

SILVER PEAK: AT WORK, AT PLAY, AND AT HOME

Interviewee: Twenty-three people with firsthand memories of Silver Peak, Nevada

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Description

While the rest of the nation struggled through the Great Depression of the 1930s, there existed a few isolated oases—towns where a single industry offered jobs and allowed families to remain together, intact and relatively unscathed by economic hardships. Silver Peak, Nevada, was among those special spots where families could thrive during the country's Depression. It is also a Nevadan community that has repeatedly survived the booms and busts typical of the mining industry. As such, Silver Peak's history promised interesting answers to questions about how and why it has survived.

The study of Silver Peak's history began in 1996. It was sponsored by Mineral Ridge Resources, Inc. (MRRI) in compliance with permitting requirements for the Bureau of Land Management. Chroniclers were chosen who could provide firsthand memories on a variety of designated topics, including mining and milling technology, transportation, housing, community and family relationships, and recreation. A total of twenty-three chroniclers were interviewed, resulting in over forty hours of audio tapes which were transcribed by the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) and compiled in this research volume. The original oral history tapes were donated by MRRI to UNOHP and are archived at the University of Nevada, Reno campus.

Each of the Silver Peak oral histories contains insights into Silver Peak and the Mineral Ridge Mining District. Each of the chroniclers added important pieces to the amazing picture that was Silver Peak from the 1930s through the 1980s.

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At Work, At Play, and At Home

Edited by Victoria Ford

University of Nevada
Oral History Program

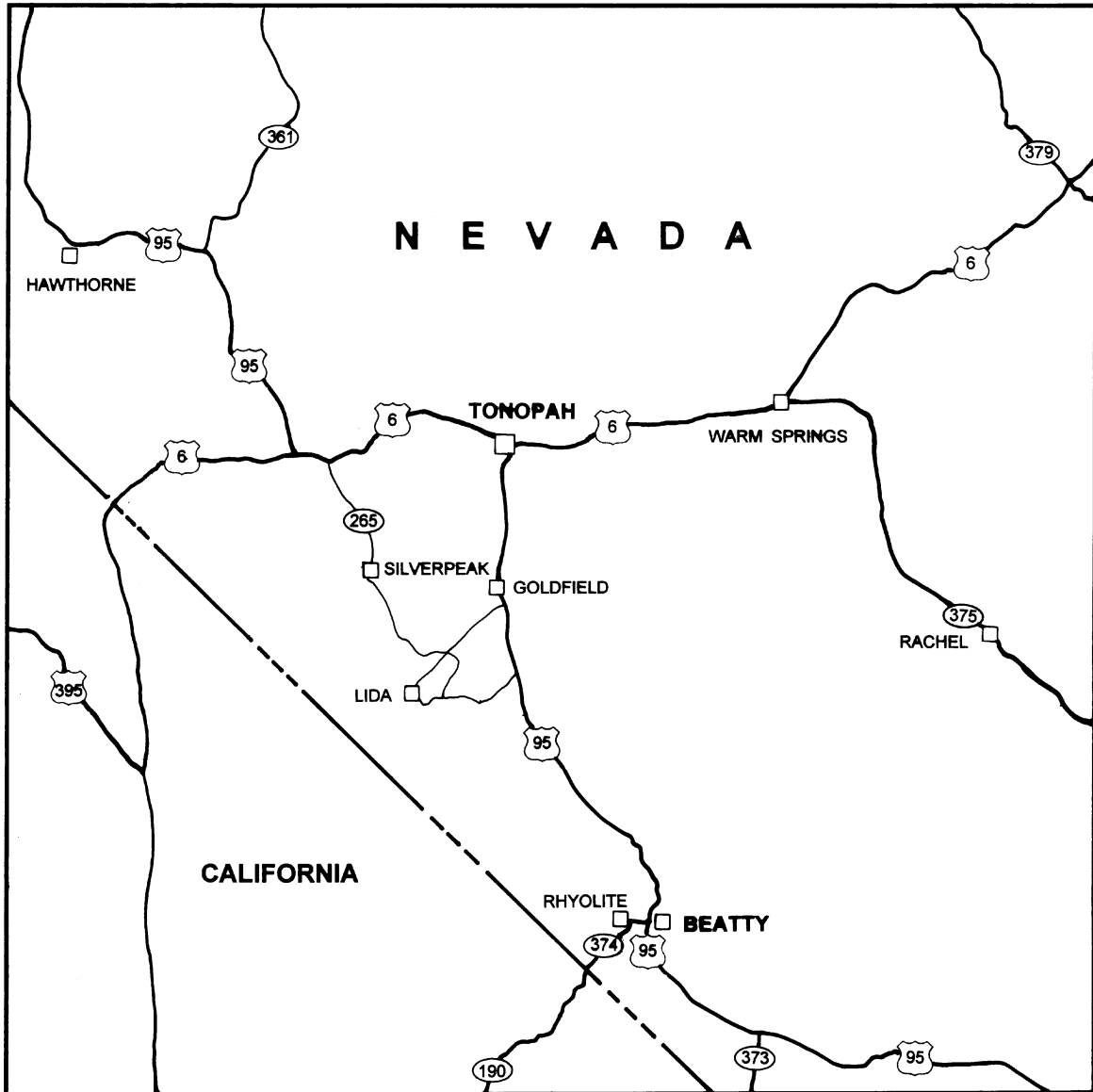
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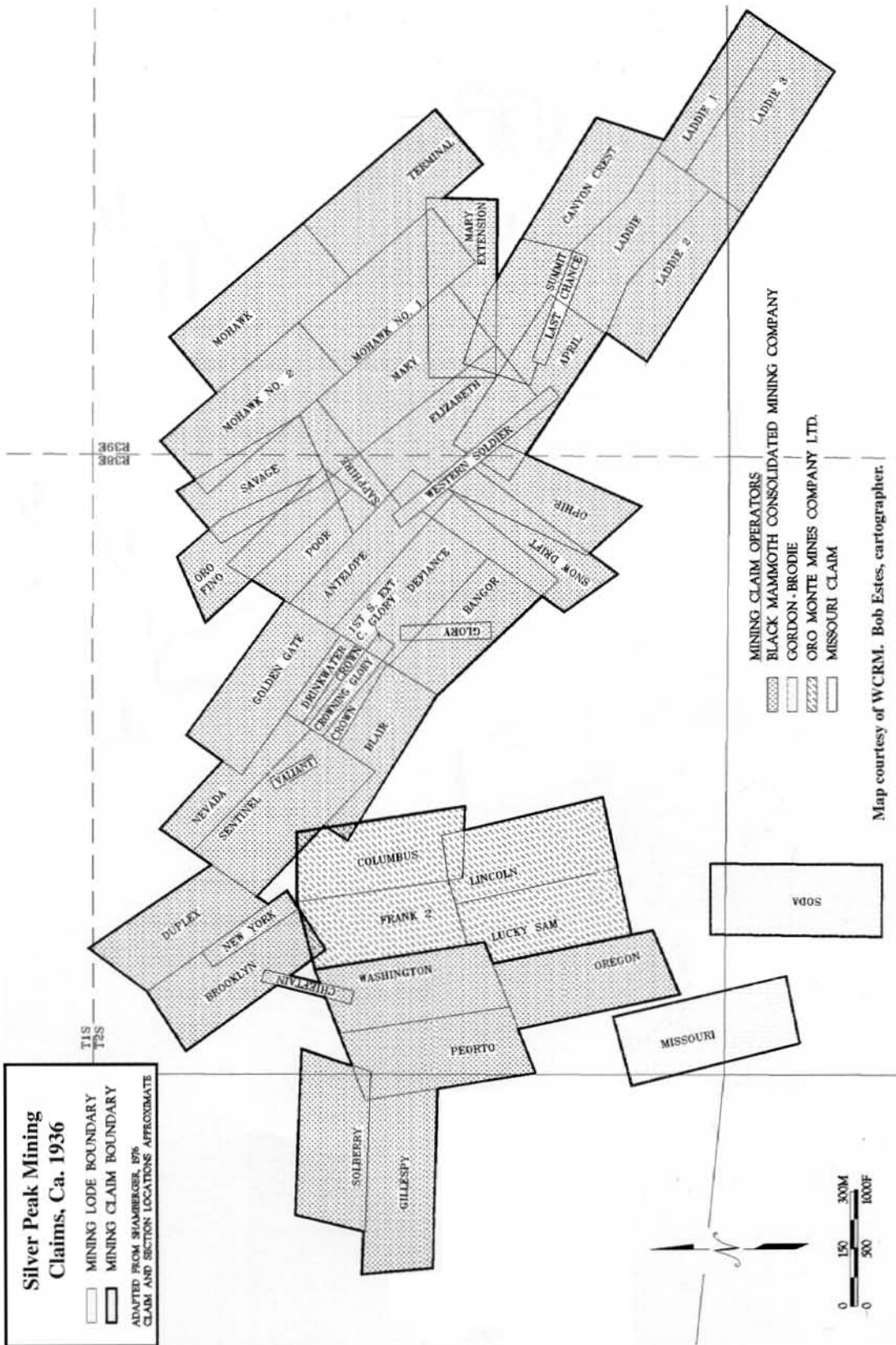
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10 0 10 20 MILES
10 0 10 20 KILOMETERS

MINERAL RIDGE HISTORIC MINING DISTRICT

Map courtesy of WCRM.
Karen Laramore, graphic artist.



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INTRODUCTION

While the rest of the nation struggled through the Great Depression of the 1930s, there existed a few isolated oases—towns where a single industry offered jobs and allowed families to remain together, intact and relatively unscathed by economic hardships. Silver Peak, Nevada, was among those special spots where families could thrive during the country's Depression. It is also one of Nevada's communities that has repeatedly survived the booms and busts typical of the mining industry. As such, Silver Peak's history promised interesting answers to questions about how and why it has survived.

The study of Silver Peak's history began in 1996. It was sponsored by Mineral Ridge Resources, Inc. (MRRI) in compliance with permitting requirements for the Bureau of Land Management and was combined with archaeological and archival research on Silver Peak and Mineral Ridge Mining District. Chroniclers were chosen who could provide firsthand memories on a variety of designated topics, including mining and milling technology, transportation, housing, community and family relationships, and recreation. A total of twenty-three chroniclers were interviewed, resulting in over forty hours of audio tapes which were transcribed

by the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) and compiled in this research volume. The original oral history tapes were donated by MRRI to UNOHP and are archived at the University of Nevada, Reno campus. Copies of this lightly edited research volume will be placed in the university libraries at Reno and Las Vegas, the Silver Peak and Tonopah libraries, and the Central Nevada Museum in Tonopah.

Each of the Silver Peak oral histories contains insights into Silver Peak and the Mineral Ridge Mining District. However, when in print, oral discourse lacks the gestures, inflection, tone, and other nuances that make normal conversation lively and understandable. As much as possible, I have kept each person's original words, while deleting repetitions, false starts, and wording that is confusing. Accepted oral history devices were used to help clarify meaning. Ellipses, which are normally used to indicate deleted material, are used to show pauses either for emotional or dramatic effect. Appearing in brackets, [laughter] appears when the chronicler laughs in amusement or to express irony. Otherwise, bracketed information contains editor's comments to help clarify a spoken passage.

Each person interviewed has reviewed the finished manuscript of his or her oral history and has affirmed its accuracy. However, as with all oral histories, memory is imperfect and the recollections may not be free of error.

The Silver Peak oral history project was exciting for me. From the moment I first drove into town to the final moments of editing the research volume and the book, I felt sure that all of us, working together, were helping add to our understanding of Nevada history. Each of the chroniclers added important pieces to the amazing picture that was Silver Peak from the 1930s through the 1980s. I enjoyed each interview and appreciated each person's willingness to share his or her memories. Each time I worked with transcripts, I felt a renewed excitement at the unfolding story.

In addition to the chroniclers, many people made this project a reality including Charles Zeier of Resource Concepts, Inc., Carson City; Tom Rinaldi, Hank Lesinski, Ben Viljoen and several other staff members of Mineral Ridge Resources Inc.; Professor Don Hardesty of the Anthropology Department, University of Nevada, Reno; Renee Kolvet, Steve Mehls, and Edward J. Stoner of Western Cultural Resource Management ; and Director Tom King, Assistant Director Mary Larson, and Kathleen Coles, Linda Sommer, Kathryn Wright-Ross, Amy Fiack, Kim Goddard, and Danny Howard of the UNOHP, who transcribed, designed, and published this research volume.

VICTORIA FORD
University of Nevada

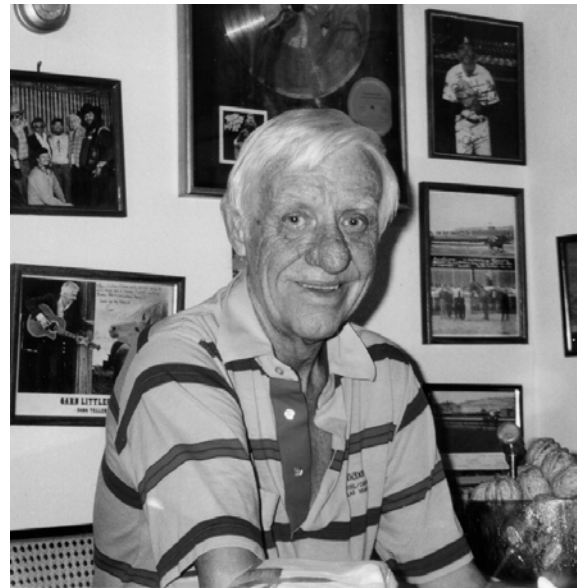
STEWART CARNALL

STEWART CARNALL was the son of Ronald “Pete” Carnall, a partner and promoter who worked with Fred Vollmar Jr. during the heyday of the Black Mammoth Company. Although Stewart never lived in Silver Peak, when he was between the ages of eight and fifteen years old, his father took him along on trips to Silver Peak. A child in a man’s world, Stewart had vivid memories of those trips, as well as some of the investors and their lavish lifestyle resulting from successful mining investments. Stewart Carnall died in 1998, two years after this oral history interview, and was remembered for his success in booking top-name entertainers, such as Merle Haggard and Willie Nelson, for casino shows at Reno and Lake Tahoe.



VICTORIA FORD: Today is August 16, 1996, and I’m here with Stewart Carnall in his home in Gardnerville. We’re going to be talking about Silver Peak, Nevada. First of all, I’m pronouncing your name wrong. It’s Carnall, correct? [pronounced like Carnell]

STEWART CARNALL: Yes.



OK. And tell me where and when you were born.

August 26, 1929, in Evanston, Illinois. We left there when I was three months old and moved to Pasadena, California.

Your connection to Silver Peak was through your dad, is that correct?

That’s right. He [Ronald “Pete” Carnall] and Fred Vollmar and various other

people . . . E.L. Cord, Tommy Warner They were money people, and they were investing.

Which mines did your father invest in with Fred Vollmar?

The Mary Mine, the Nivloc, and the Black Mammoth.

He put in money, but he didn't actually stay there and do any of the operation. He wasn't involved in mining other than investing in it, is that correct?

No, he was involved in overseeing. We went there many weekends. I remember coming up Highway 395 and turning off . . . just below Bishop, the road turned off there. Montgomery Pass, that's the road we cut up on.

Tell me your first memory of Silver Peak. How old were you?

I believe I was eight, and I remember quite a bit about it. I remember Fred Vollmar. He amazed me because about two years later Fred was a tremendous gambler, and he had a room that he kept all the time at the Saint Paul Hotel, right in downtown Los Angeles. He kept a personal barber, and he bet the horses all the time. He would bet the eastern tracks in the morning with a bookie. He had a personal bookie, and he would bet large amounts of money in those days.

How large?

Oh, he bet a couple of hundred dollars, and that was huge money in those days.

And that would have been the 1930s?

And he'd bet six or eight races back East, and then he'd go to Santa Anita and bet. We

used to go together, and he really was good to me. We'd go out there, and he kept saying, "Kid, don't get involved in this. This is a bad deal."

By "this," he meant gambling?

Yes. One time Fred said, "Don't bet this race, it's a bad race to bet." It was the last race at Santa Anita. Fred had one guy that he placed his bets with every day, so I said to that man, "Do you have a dollar? I want to bet. We'll go in partners and bet this" You had to bet two dollars. So the name of the horse was Tobacco Road, and I'll never forget it. Now that's something to remember! I remember what it paid, and that got me hooked on horses. [laughter]

So what he was saying to you was, "Don't get hooked," but he was taking you along while he bet on the races, and you got hooked?

Yes, what I did was get hooked. So the cashier put up a dollar, and I put up a dollar, and we bet on Tobacco Road, and it won . . . paid \$49.80. So, we split half-and-half on that, and that's like a windfall for a ten-year-old kid.

Let's go back to Silver Peak. You said that you remember driving up there with your dad. Where did you stay?

At Fred Vollmar's house.

With he and his wife [Lois] at their home in Silver Peak?

Right.

OK. Can you just describe that house to me?

As I remember, it was three bedrooms, and . . . his wife was a hell of a cook. Good

food. And he loved shooting. He was an excellent marksman.

Did you get to go out target shooting with him?

Oh, yes.

We've talked before, and from the stories you've told me, your dad and Fred took you along with all the men on these weekends. You were allowed to go with the adult men?

Yes. I was the new kid on the block. We'd go up and check the mines and wander around.

Did you get to go down in the mines?



"We'd go up and check the mines and wander around. . . It was pretty spooky to me at that age." (Photograph courtesy of Stewart Carnall.)

Yes. It was pretty spooky to me at that age. I said, "Where are we going?"

My dad would say, "It's OK. We're going to go down and check this."

We have a picture of you, and they had a miner's outfit for you with a gold pan and the works.

I think Fred got the gold pan for me. I think he gave me that to strap around my shoulders.

Did they let you try out the work when you were down in the mine?

Oh, yes, but I didn't know what I was doing. [laughter] A ten-year-old kid, how are you going to find ore? I couldn't today. [laughter] Well, maybe I could today.

You went on some hunting trips with them, is that right? Tell me about those.

We went up in the Reese River country out of Austin, and it was one of the best experiences of my life. I think I was maybe eleven then, maybe twelve. And there must have been about twenty, thirty people that went up. We rode horses way back about ten miles and set up camp by the Reese River outside of Austin, Nevada. E.L. Cord was one of them and Tommy Warner . . . Warner tools or whatever they made, but it's a big company. I was the only kid.

As a kid, did you know who E.L. Cord was?

No, I had no idea.

It was only later that you realized who you had met?

All I know now is that he had a 50,000-watt radio station in Reno, because [as an adult] I would book entertainers there, but other than that I didn't know who he was.

You just knew that these were all people who invested in the mines, and Fred Vollmar would take them on these outings.

Fred and my dad. My dad was very involved with much of it. They were partners, and the others were investors.

I see. So your dad and Fred would put together these outings as a pleasure trip for the investors? Was it a hunting trip? Was it fishing?

Everything—hunting, fishing. I remember catching brook trout out of that stream and seeing two hundred deer grazing down below where we were camped. And I remember taking target practice, where you'd have to flush the sage hens out of the way. They'd walk right . . . They're not a smart animal.

One of the things that you're describing is that your father had money to invest and was very involved in this mine. And this

had to be during the Depression years. Is that right?

My father and Fred Vollmar had *nothing* to invest. They went out and looked for investors. Now, don't you understand that? They found the gold, and then they'd sell the proposition to other people—E.L. Cord and Warner, and I don't know who the other ones were, but there were twenty or thirty of them that they took on that one trail ride when I was allowed to go.

So did the Depression affect your family at all? Were you short of anything during the Depression, or were those good years for you?

No, we had a butler, beautiful home in Arcadia, Packard Touring Car. No, nothing affected us, so the Depression I never felt.

So the mining business, at least getting people to invest in the mining business, was profitable?



"My father and Fred Vollmar had nothing to invest. They went out and looked for investors . . . E.L. Cord and Warner." Partners Pete Carnall (center) and Fred Vollmar Jr. (right) take a break in front of an unidentified mine site. (Photograph courtesy of Stewart Carnall.)

And it was sensible, because they all made money: E.L. Cord made money; Warner made money; my dad made money; Vollmar made money. What else can you ask for?

You said your dad went off to Tonopah and did some gambling, is that right?

Oh, yes. I remember one time he went into the Mizpah Hotel. I sat on the side on a high chair, and he was playing roulette and damn near broke the place. By the time I dozed off, he had lost about half of it back. This was a lot of money in those days. I think he was about \$40,000 in front, and they had the wooden boxes of silver dollars out there. Anyway, he got out of there a winner, a little bit.

But not the \$40,000?

No, he didn't bust the place.

We had a dog called Rusty we took up there one time, when we went to Silver Peak, and the dog got loose—a beautiful Irish Setter. About ten days later somebody found it (it had a tag on it) right outside of Goldfield, about forty miles away. And it had been in scrapes with coyotes and everything, but it got out alive, and we went and got it.

You used a phrase that I hadn't heard before, that your dad used after he had gone to one of the houses where there were prostitutes.

You mean a house of prostitution. I think I was about fifteen, maybe sixteen, when he told me about this place. And he said, "They got creepers in the paddlejoint." A lot of old-timers will remember that, and new folks on the block wouldn't know what the hell I'm talking about.

What does that phrase mean?

They used to have creepers in the paddlejoints, and they had a false walk outside the rooms where the girls were doing their number. They'd have like a coat hanger, a long thing, and they'd jerk their pants up and rob them and put the pants back, and it was all over then. But they called them creepers in the paddlejoint.

And at the time you didn't know what that meant either?

At fifteen I really didn't know. No. Later I did. If E.L. Cord was alive, he'd know the phrase; or if Fred Vollmar was alive, he would know the phrase; or if Pete Carnall was alive, he would know the phrase; and many miners would, too—the ones that got robbed. [laughter]

That got robbed in the same way that your dad did?

No, he didn't get robbed. He was just telling me how they are. No, and I hope that he never went to one of those places—den of inequity. No, I hope he didn't; but if he did, it's OK.

And your mom and your dad were married at that time?

Yes.

Did your mother ever come up with you to Silver Peak?

Never, ever. No.

OK. Your mother's name was what?

Mary Stuart.

And you said that it was your understanding from your father that the Mary Mine is named after her?

Yes.

Were there other kids around Silver Peak, or was it mostly men at that time in the 1930s?

I can't remember any kids, because I was like eight to eleven, twelve maybe, and I don't remember any other kids. It was all men and wives.

So most of your time was spent with your dad and with Fred and the men on the weekends?

Fred was a very gracious man, even in later years. I think it was 1973 or 1974, when he was living in Austin, Nevada, my wife and I stopped by and visited him. He was really ill then. We had a nice visit. Because he was bedridden then, I said, "Wouldn't you like to be at Santa Anita rather than here?" And he laughed, and we shook hands. I spent about an hour with him.

So you stayed in touch with him all of your life?

Oh, he was an amazing man. He was. He was an articulate Indian.

He was part [Native American] Indian?

Yes. And he knew what the hell he was doing, and he knew where to find the ore.

And he knew promotion evidently, in order to get people to invest.

That's right. Well, what the situation was, he went to my dad, and my dad got the money people, and they put them together. They didn't sell stocks in that time; they invested. But he was an exceptional man.

He sounds a little flamboyant to me.

Well, that's why he bet two hundred dollars every morning on six different horse races back East, and then went to Santa Anita and bet. And he told me I was crazy to bet a dollar with the other guy on that horse, and he went crazy when we . . . well, he was happy, though. He was happy.

What happened that you stopped going to Silver Peak? Did your dad stop working with these mines?

Yes. There were problems with the IRS on taxes, and I really don't know the details on it.

So after about age fifteen or so, you stopped your trips to Silver Peak?

Right. We went to several other places, but I don't remember the names of them, where they were looking for new finds.

Did your father go back to Silver Peak, or did he stay connected to Fred in Silver Peak in any way?

No, Fred still came down to Los Angeles to the Saint Paul Hotel.

And your father died in what year?

1971. I chartered a plane and took his ashes over, and I dropped them on the Black Mammoth Mine. And then when my mother died, I did the same thing with her, because I thought she would like to be with him. I'll never forget that final plane trip with my dad's ashes. We were floating around, looking, and I said, "There's the mine there." I still knew where the mine was. So we flew over the mine, and I tossed my dad's ashes and two winning tickets on a horse race and one red rose.

Was that at their request?

No, but I thought as long as he's there, she would like to be there.

And somehow that felt like a special place to you, is that right? That's why you chose that for your father?

Right, and my mother, because I thought they'd want to be there, because that was the highlight of our life. They made the money there, and life was really good in those years in the 1930s.

Did your lifestyle change after that, after the problem with the IRS, when your dad started working with other mines?

No. He went to work for . . . E.F. Hutton. No, he was with E.F. Hutton when he was putting these deals together, and then they moved to Santa Barbara and had a beautiful home in Santa Barbara. He had an insurance agency there, which he didn't really care about, I don't think, but they called him "Premium Pete." Oh, he'd sell anybody an insurance policy! But he lived a good life.

And Silver Peak was part of the best time for him, and for you, too, to be able to go with him?

All my life has been great. Really, I haven't had a bad day.

Tell me how you came to live here in Gardnerville.

Well, I was booking entertainers. At first I booked them at Harrah's at Lake Tahoe and Reno. My wife and her brother, we used to drive through this place all the time, and I said, "I love this place." So eventually we moved up here, and then I started booking. They didn't have country acts in the main rooms, and the first one I booked was Merle

Haggard, who was (in my thinking) one of the premier entertainers of all time.

And then my ex-wife, Laurie, said, "Why don't you call Willie Nelson? He's a good friend of yours."

So I called him. He said, "Yes, I'll do it." So, it's been that way ever since. I still book them when they're up here.

That was something you became interested in as a fairly young man?

Oh, when I was a kid! When I was in prep school . . . prep school, that's a bad phrase. In high school, I was not ready for regular schools. I needed attention. I just wasn't concentrating. I was taking French, shop, basket weaving, and athletics. All I wanted to do was be a ballplayer.

So, at that point, you weren't following in your father's footsteps about mines and investments?

No. No.

What were his thoughts on that?

"You're crazy."

And I said, "Well, we'll see when it's all over."

When I was a child, he used to chase me with a rake when he would get mad at me. I'd laugh, and he'd chase and follow me, and every now and then he'd whack me a little bit with a bamboo rake [and say], "You've got to straighten up."

It looked to me like [in the pictures] your dad played with you and spent time with you.

It was all in fun.

It seems like you might have had a good relationship with your dad.

Great. Great. I liked all those people. I liked E.L. Cord. We used to fish on the river. And Tommy Warner, he was a good guy. My dad said, "Don't get out of line with these people. They're the money people." [laughter]

That's what he said to you?

Yes. Most of the time in the evening we'd spend at Fred's home. They didn't take me downtown too much, and I don't even think they went down that much. My dad might have snuck away, or Fred might have, too, because Fred snuck away and gambled on horses. He was an outgoing, good guy, and

my dad was too. They both They were pieces of work.

Meaning that they were pretty unique?

Right.

Very different from the run-of-the-mill type of person?

No, you would find them on Let's see, where wouldn't you find them? Oh, you might find them in the Palace Hotel or something on a weekend spree, but they were just down-to-earth, good people.

BOB DOUGLASS

***B**OB DOUGLASS was born in Tonopah in 1914. When he graduated from high school, one of his first jobs was building the Vollmar Mill in Silver Peak, Nevada. His memories paint a lively picture of a single, young man finding fun in an old mining camp. His stories range from good food and Saturday night dances to fights and practical jokes. Bob's brother Jack Douglass's oral history Tap Dancing on Ice was published in 1996.*

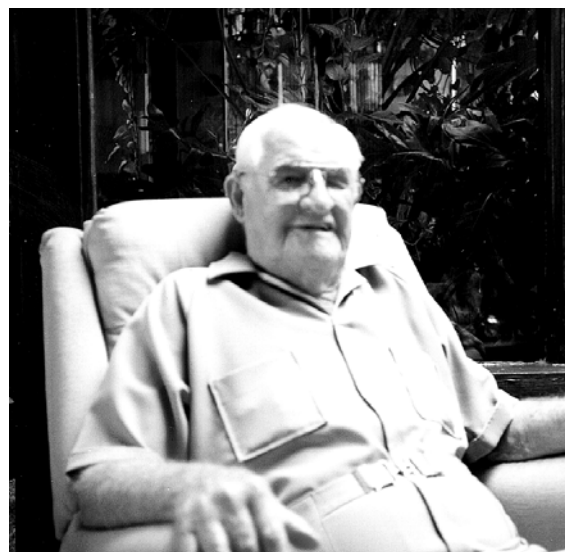


VICTORIA FORD: Today is August 19, 1996, and I am here in Reno with Bob Douglass in his home. We are going to be talking about his memories of Tonopah and Silver Peak, Nevada. Bob, would you tell me what your birthday is and where you were born?

BOB DOUGLASS: I was born in Tonopah, and my name is Robert P. Douglass. I was born on Saint Patrick's Day in 1914 in Tonopah, Nevada.

And what were your parents' names?

William James and Katie. Kathleen Dee.



Kathleen Dee Douglass, and that's Douglass spelled with two s's.

With two s's, yes. We're the Irish.

The Irish Douglass. OK. So you were born in Tonopah. What was your family doing in Tonopah?

My dad was a mining man. He was in charge of the Tonopah Midway Divide Mining Company.

You say "in charge." What was his job?

Well, he was like manager of that.

Manager or superintendent or something?

Well, he was above superintendent. He was a manager of the whole operation.

So you grew up in a mining family.

Yes.

Did your dad ever take you out to the mines or show you what he did?

He would never take us underground, the boys. He took my sister. See, there was five of us—four boys and one girl. And she went to the university, and she'd bring all the kids down there, trainloads of kids. And then he'd take them all through the mines, but he wouldn't let us get in, in Tonopah, because the mines in Tonopah were [full of] silicosis, were terrible. I saw a big, big surge of men come in there, big husky men, die in six months with the silicosis in their lungs.

As a kid you saw that?

Yes, and he wouldn't allow us down underground.

He didn't want his boys down there. So he did the mining, but you pretty much stayed out of the mines and grew up, went to school in Tonopah?

Well, I got into mining afterwards, yes, but not through him.

Not through him, OK. We'll come back to that then. But you grew up in Tonopah, and did you graduate from Tonopah?

Yes, I did. Tonopah High School in 1932, I think, or 1933. I don't know which year.

What did you do after high school?

I went down to Millers, I think, and went to work down at Millers.

And what was Millers?

Well, Millers is about eighteen miles from Tonopah where the Tonopah Divide Mining Company used to run their ore. But now this company that was in there when I was there was rerunning that ore and getting that silver out of there, because you could sweep those ponds, those cyanide ponds, and get silver out of them, you know. So what they were doing, they were grinding this finer and getting silver out of it.

I see, so they were probably working with the tailings, is that . . .

They were reworking the tailings is what they were doing. There was a mountain of those things that the Tonopah Mining Company had down there.

And so that was your first job after high school, to work with this?

And the first job, yes, I think was down in there.

And then what took you to Silver Peak? How did you learn the . . . ?

Well, I think I went to work for the state highway department, and then I went to Silver Peak. The reason I went on to Silver Peak, they were going to build that mill for Vollmar . . . the Vollmar's mill. And I think Guy Birch, he was from Tonopah . . . He was a big man. He was the superintendent that was in charge of building that. He was the millwright, actually, and he built that mill. It was through him that I got the job, and he had a bunch of Tonopah kids and a

bunch of Silver Peak kids and a bunch of Goldfield kids to help with the construction.

OK. And so you learned about the job, and you decided to hire onto that?

I went onto that job. And they were paying us, I think, four dollars an hour.

Four dollars an hour or per day?

Perry White was running the bar and the restaurant down there, and we used to eat down there, and Ma Brown had the restaurant. And she had all the girls around there working for her. We used to go in there, and there must have been about twenty-five or thirty of us kids, you know, that were building that mill. And we had a lot of fun down there. [laughter]

You had a good time down there. Let's talk about where you lived. When you went down there, you said they had a boardinghouse and a restaurant. Did you live in the boardinghouse?

No, I lived across the street next to the Smith brothers' place. The Smith brothers had a store, and the Smiths made a lot of money and then moved up to Gabbs years later. I had left Nevada.

But you lived in a house right next to it. What kind of a house was it?

Oh, it was just a one-bedroom place. And I lived there with Eddie Johnson, a carpenter on the job, and to me he was an old man. I think he was about sixty years old. But he used to worry himself to death about me because I was just like a kid, you know. I'd be tripping and fall over the banisters and everything else. We all did for that matter.

He was worried about your safety?

Yes.

How did you find out to live with him? Were you renting the place from him, or was he renting that?

Well, I guess he asked me to come on down. Hurry. There was an extra bed there, I could stay there. It just . . . any place anybody could get a bed, they stayed, you know.

Because it was hard to find a place to stay?

Yes, hard to find a place to stay, and so any place you could find, you stayed there. We had a lot of fun down there.

Was this a wood house or adobe or . . . ?

It was adobe I lived in.

OK. Did you pay him rent, do you remember?

We paid, I think it was sixty dollars a month for the two of us.

For the two of you, OK. So he was renting, too.

Yes, he was renting, but I don't know if I paid through him or how I paid it.

And then you went across the street to the boardinghouse or to the restaurant?

Right across the street was the boardinghouse run by Perry White and Mrs. Brown. And they lived together, but Mrs. Brown ran the restaurant, and Perry White ran the bar. And he used to have a mail run between Tonopah and Manhattan, so then he went out there.

I see. So he did everything. He was the postman and the boardinghouse, and she did the restaurant.

Yes. Yes. They had [to be] a jack-of-all-trades, you know.

OK. And you ate over there. Did you have good food at the . . . ?

Oh, very, very good food. And she always used to make lemonade in a big tub A bunch of young kids, you know, would come in, and they were bored. We would drink three or four tubs of lemonade. [laughter]

They were like washtubs, is that what she put them in?

Giant washtubs is all it was.

What else do you remember that she made that you liked?

Well, it was just good, wholesome food. Yes, it was a great place, yes.

Do you remember about what a meal would cost, or did you pay . . . ?

About fifty cents, because I know the drinks in the bars cost us fifteen cents.

So that's where you were living. And then . . . the Vollmar Mill, is that the one right in Silver Peak?

That's the little one down here.

And so you could just walk to work then from where you lived?

Well, I don't know how we got to work. It seems to me we rode up there somehow. And we dug all those foundations with picks and shovels, you know, for that mill, instead

of building it with a Cat or anything. All by hand we dug, see.

What was your job?

Well, my job was just . . . when we started, we were all the same, because we got to dig ditches to get the foundation for this mill, and then we got the jobs. And then I would sneak into the office and look at old Birch's time book, and I came out and I told Oh, there were a bunch of young guys. I guess I was about twenty-two or twenty-three, and they were all the same age, and they were full of devilment. And so I says, "Oh, they're going to pay a lot of money for riggers." The riggers are the guys that get up on a two-by-four and pound.

Way up high?

Yes. And I said, "They're going to pay more money for that, but I don't know what they're going to pay for me. I don't know what they're going to pay, but they're sure going to pay a lot of money for riggers." They were going to pay the same thing for riggers. [laughter] And so old Birch lined us up every morning, you know, like a bunch of army kids. So he'd say, "Douglass, Traynor, Clark, step up. You're supposed to be a rigger." And they were all set on rigging. And he came to me, and I said, "No, I come from a family of miners not circus people. I'm not going to." And I got to run the tugger. It was the same money, but the tugger was just like a telephone post with a cable on it, and it had a little air tugger on the bottom of it. You would tug up everything, up to them to use, you know.

So you got to stay on the ground?

I got to stay on the ground.

Because you didn't want to be up in that high place?

I didn't want to be up there standing around on a two-by-four or an eight-by-eight. [laughter] Those guys . . .

Did they get mad at you for doing that?

Well, they did afterwards, but they didn't at that time.

When they had figured out what you had done.

Yes.

So you worked as a tugger. Any other specific jobs that you can remember?

No, I think after we built the mill, then we left there.

OK. So about how long were you in Silver Peak?

Oh, I was there, I guess, three or four months.

Three or four months, that's about how long it took to build it?

Yes. I had a lot of fun down there as a kid, you know.

Tell me about some of the fun.

Well, the kids would come out there and be looking for a girl all the time, you know. Well, all the good-looking girls it seemed like were in Goldfield. And so the Stark sisters were very good-looking girls. And old man Stark was a bootlegger, you know. And we used to come out to the Peak, and he had a place out at the Peak, and so every time a guy would come out, he would say, "My God, isn't there any girls around this place?"

"Oh, sure, we could get you girls if you want them. You go down to that old house

down around the corner. That's where they're living is down there."

"Who's down there?" Now, I'm not going to say who the guy was. Anyway, he went down around the corner, and he says . . .

Now, there was, I think, Clark and myself, and we took the guy down there, and we said, "There's a big moonlight. My God, you can see for a hundred miles in the desert down there. And," I said, "now, you be very quiet, and you go up there and knock on that door very quiet, and the girls will come out. But don't make any noise. Just go up there quiet, so he don't hear you. So just knock on the door quiet, and the girls will come out." [laughter] Out comes Felix Traynor shooting the shotgun, you know. And this kid ran off down in the desert, and we never found him for three days. [laughter]

And so the girls' dad came out and shot the shotgun?

No, the girls weren't there at all. It was just an old empty house, you know. And we had a couple of shotguns inside there. And we knocked on the door, and guys come out and started shooting shotguns, you know. And he ran off, and we never found him for three days.

Was that kind of a typical joke that you played on newcomers?

Well, that's the kind that we used to play on each other, you know. A guy came in there with an ice cream wagon. He was selling ice cream one time, and [we] got him drunker than hell and stole all of his ice cream. Oh, God, we had a lot of fun though. I never had any money, because Fritz Vollmar used to pay us off, and then he'd have a poker game. Well, after I worked there for three or four months, I never had enough to get a haircut, for God's sake.

Because you kept losing your paycheck?

Well, everything was on the cuff down there, see. The bar was on the cuff. You wanted to go in and get a drink, you'd go in the bar, and old Perry just marked it down, you know. So along came Vollmar with the paycheck, there was nothing left. We just spent it all down there.

Because you had no concept of what you were spending?

And I remember Felix Traynor was married, and he'd go to Tonopah, because . . . (Josie is now in a home out here in Reno. She's quite feeble now.) But in that time, why Felix . . . There were the Traynor boys—Felix, Todd, and Buddy. And there was three girls, too, three boys and three girls in the family. So Felix was the oldest boy, and he was one that discovered Weepah. But anyway, by this time he was married to Josie. Josie Sarato was her name. And he'd come out there, and I'd say, "It's your turn to buy a beer."

"No, I can't."

"You buy a beer, Felix. It's your turn to buy a beer."

"No, I can't."

"Why can't you?"

"Because Josie only gave me twenty-five cents!" [laughter]

From his paycheck?

So we sure had a lot of fun out there, though.

It sounds like having a drink was part of the fun, going to the bars.

Oh, that was. Yes, we'd go, but there was nothing else to do out there, you know.

Really?

And dance. We could have a dance. We'd get the school teacher and the Shirley girls.

There was three Shirley girls. There was Virginia that married Harvey Humphrey. Ethel married Hank Gilbert . . . Henry Gilbert. And there was Jane Shirley. And Louie Shirley, I think, fit right in here between these two older girls, and . . . I forget now whether there was a younger girl or not. I don't think so. Jane was about my age, and Louie was a little bit older. But they moved into Tonopah from Silver Peak, and Louie finished high school in there. And I went to school with Jane.

So they went to school there, but the Shirley family lived . . . ?

But the older girls were out of school and got married there to Harvey Humphrey and Hank Gilbert. They moved them out to the Peak with them, you know. And Shirley went back to the Peak, and Harvey Humphrey spent all of his life out there, I guess, after that. And Hank Gilbert moved to Hawthorne, and he and Ethel had that five-and-dime store for years down there, and then he died in Hawthorne.

I see, so back when you were having dances, those Shirley girls were among the few females . . .

Well, the Shirley girls worked for Ma Brown, you know, [along with] her daughter and the Chiatovich girl. And I don't know—a couple of school teachers around there—three or four different girls. There was fifty or twenty of us kids, and we'd go in that bar, and my brother had a jukebox in there. And we'd go in there, and we'd have a dance galore—have a good time.

So you had all these young single guys that were working on the mill and just a few girls to dance with.

Oh, yes. And besides that, Bugs Warner, you know, he'd come out there. That's

another story now. Vollmar owned the mine up there, and Vollmar was the nephew of Harry Stimler. And Harry Stimler was the smartest . . . was one of the discoverers of Goldfield, but they were Indians. And Harry Stimler stayed down around Hollywood, and he sold stock. And Vollmar hung around Tonopah as a kid, and he worked around Tonopah. And then he went out and got that Mary's Mine. He leased that Mary's Mine out in . . .

Out by Blair?

Yes. Up on top of the hill out there at Silver Peak. And he brought Cord and the Kelloggs—Kellogg used to own Forest Lawn in Los Angeles. Bugs Warner—Warner used to make all the Turkin gears for General Motors. And the boys, he didn't know what to do with the [his] boys, so he just give them a hole to dig up there. He had a helper. And he went through about five or six Cadillacs, I don't know. That kid. It was too bad. And I met that kid one day years later down at the old Mapes. God, he had been through so many wrecks, he didn't know what the hell he was doing hardly. And I guess they kind of disowned him.

But these were E.L. Cord and Kellogg and so on, these were among the investors in the mine?

Investors in the mine.

With Vollmar.

Yes. And then they came into Silver Peak and bought those ranches down there and lived down there. And Cord liked it. Cord . . . he's one of the greatest things to happen to Nevada. And he was a senator down there from Esmeralda County, and he went up to be a legislator.

I see. And so, were they investing at the time you were there building the mill?

Yes. They invested . . . they put up the money for that mill.

For the mill, OK. Did you ever see them while you were down there working on that?

No, I didn't see them.

They didn't come into town? But everybody knew who was putting up the money?

Yes. Vollmar was around there all the time. He always had a deck of cards when it was payday. [laughter]

He didn't have to put out very many paychecks then, did he?

No, it didn't cost him too much money. Oh, I guess there were some guys that got away with it [their paychecks], but a lot of us kids, you know, just stayed there. And I never had anything—I never had any money when I came out of there, but I had a lot of fun and a lot of experience.

What else do you remember that was so much fun there?

Well, Silver Peak is an old camp, and the Mary's Mine is an old mine. It was worked, I don't know, years ago when Tonopah, I guess, was discovered. It was around the time it was first worked, and then it was abandoned. And I think that Vollmar went in and got a lease on it, and then he struck some gold in there or something. He was hauling that ore down there . . . had that mill down there. He was going to run the ore. I don't know what ever happened after that.

When you were in town at Silver Peak, that three or four months working on the mill,

were there a lot of people in town? What would you say the population was then?

Oh, I'd say the population was maybe five, six hundred.

And this would have been in the 1930s, right?

Yes. Yes. It was booming out there, you know. We didn't have any payrolls around here in the 1930s.

Right, because that was the Depression.

There was no payrolls. There and Weepah and a few more places were the only payrolls around here, and the highway department.

So that was a good job for a young man in those days.

Yes. It was a good job for us.

Yes. And you got your food and your room and . . .

No, we got our food, and we got a good lesson. [laughter]

Good lesson about finances. Were there any problems with law and order? Did you see a lot of fights among the young guys?

Oh, we'd have our fights all the time, but it didn't matter anything, you know. If we couldn't get along, we'd go out there and fight. It just didn't matter. You'd get beat up, or somebody ought to beat you up. What the hell is the difference? You didn't care. You shook hands and went on with the dance.

So the sheriff didn't come along and throw you in the jail for it?

Oh, no. No. Nobody threw us in jail for anything. If they threw us in jail, we'd still be there. [laughter]

Were you involved in any of those fights?

Oh, it was just like a young kid. Sure I was involved with them. All of us were involved with them. I remember one night I bought a drink for the bar, you know. Everything on the cuff—we didn't care. We were dancing. And Bob Benjamin (I don't know what his actual name was), he was a very good friend of mine. "Bob Smith" he was going by then, and he was the brother of Jimmy Gavin that started the Mammoth Bar down there, and a half-brother. Bob Smith moved to Hawthorne. But he and I were very good friends, you know. So one night I bought a drink for the bar. And bingo, down he come and swept everything down, broke all the glass and everything. He said, "Mr. Douglass, if I can't buy a drink, you're not going to buy one. So get back in the bar."

And I said, "All right, Mr. Smith." He ordered a drink, and I went down and swept off the drinks off the bar, broke the glass, and the bartender was writing down everything we done. So I don't know . . . oh, boy, I must have drank an awful lot, because I went out and fell off the goddamn . . . At the time we had a porch with a big railing on it, and I fell over the railing, and I must have knocked myself out, because they took me home in a wheelbarrow. [laughter]

And you woke up at home the next morning?

Yes. I woke with Eddie. Eddie always worried about me. [laughter]

I can see why he might have worried about you.

But next door to us was the Smith brothers, later had the store. But later they

made a lot of money, and they went up there and started that thing in Gabbs. And they had all the concessions up there.

So there was the Smith brothers' store, and there was the restaurant that Mrs. Brown ran, and the boardinghouse and the bar. And what else was in town at that time?

Not much. Just a little house where everybody lived, I guess. I don't know. A hole they could crawl in. [laughter]

Any paved streets, do you remember?

No. No. There was no such thing. We didn't know what pavement was.

And what about running water?

Oh, you had running water, sure.

Running water in the house or from a well?

Sure. I don't know where it came from, but you had systems. The Silver Peak water system, I guess. I don't know where it came from, but as I remember we always had water, tap water.

Were there any community events while you were there? Were there any parades or celebrations?

Not until after I left. And then they used to have a lot of them after I left. I guess that's when they built the Mammoth Mill, the big mill next to it.

I see. The big one, the Mammoth Mill.

But when Vollmar was there and those guys. Whoever the Mammoth Company was, they had a lot of money, and they came in and built that mill and took that mine. And that was after me.

That was after you were there, because that big mill was right next to the Vollmar Mill that you built, right?

Yes. Yes. Well, Jimmy Morris was hauling off of the hill. He had ten-wheelers, and he was hauling the ore off of the top of the hill down to the mill.

Ten-wheelers? What were those? Can you describe them?

Well, a ten-wheeler . . . do you know what a ten-wheeler is? It is a truck with a driver and two axles. That's a ten-wheeler. But he might have [hailed] fifteen tons of them, I don't know. But that used to be quite a hill to come down. And he'd run the ore through the mill. And I don't know what happened after that. I went on to Weepah, and I was working in Weepah for a while.

In construction still?

No, Weepah was the mine.

Then you got into mining.

Well, see, if you want to call it mining. I was mill man, and I was working the crusher where they were dumping the ore and had to get the ore through the . . . up the thing into the mill.

I see. I want to stop a minute and go back. You mentioned something of interest, which is that you said your brother had jukeboxes in Silver Peak.

Yes. Jack Douglass.

And what was his business?

Well, he got started in that. My mother left there after my dad died. There was a little money involved in that.

She left Tonopah then?

She left Tonopah, was living down, as far as I know, down in Los Angeles. And Jack went down there, too, to go to school, because there . . . I think my dad was . . . got this big insurance of twelve thousand dollars or something. So she had some of that money, and she fell down and broke her kneecap, I think. A good amount . . . bust or something. And like, I had a cousin down there. She was living with my cousin, and I don't know what happened.

I know that he [Jack] had quite a bit of money when he came back, and she was supposed to be his partner. And he had a Model T Ford and three or four jukeboxes, and he came into town. And Louie Benetti down here was a brother of Angelo Benetti. There were two brothers down here, and they were bootlegging out in Sparks. And Angelo Benetti got in the slot machine business. Well, Louie thought, "Well, I can get into it too," but Louie couldn't hardly laugh in English, you know. [laughter] So he got a hold of Jack, and they started the Nevada Novelty Company. And they went from there, because Jack had, through the name, had all of southern Nevada, you know.

I see. To put slot machines and the jukeboxes . . .

Slot machines, jukeboxes, and everything else in there.

So that was on his route, to have equipment in Silver Peak?

Oh, yes.

Is Jack younger than you?

No, he's four years older than me.

Older than you, OK. But were you living at home when your dad died?

Yes.

You were. So you were still in high school?

Oh, no, I wasn't even in high school. My dad died in 1929, and I think I went into high school that year. And then my brother graduated that year, Jack did, and he went down to southern California, and my mother went with him. And I was there by myself for a few years.

Where did you stay while you finished high school?

Well, I would stay in the old house with all the kids, you know. And I had a brother [Bud] older than me that was working for the highway department. And he said, "Well, I'll feed you kids." So I had all the kids around there were living with me. And we had a great basketball [player] by the name of Chuck . . . oh, what was his name. Knowles. The coach brought him out of Ohio when he come out here to coach. He was a good basketball player, and he moved in with me, and we moved up [to] that house. And we were drinking beer, and we were doing everything. And, finally, I was missing school and the whole business.

I was going with a girl by the name of Vera Stevenson. I used to go out with Vera before I started to get in mining with . . . Her father was great for getting claims and digging down and finding [gold] and how to pan and everything. Her dad showed me that stuff, you know.

So in high school you got some experience with mining after your father died?

Well, my dad never showed me anything about mining. He had the Tonopah Mining Company, but Jake Stevenson, you know,

he was a butcher, and he was a flusterated miner. And so he'd get a place out at South Gilbert, and he'd say, "Well, we'll sink a shaft." And he'd get another guy and I to go up there and sink that shaft. And then he wanted to drive a drift out at the divide. We went out and drove a drift at the divide. And, oh, I walked all over every hill there was in Nevada, I think, with him. And we panned every place we could, you know, and get a little gold.

This was all while you were in high school?

While I was in high school, but I moved up there. And then one night when I was living down there in the house, why, she and her mother and, I guess, her brother come down and moved all my stuff up to their house.

Oh, so that you would have a home to come to?

So I would finish high school.

Because you were missing a lot of school, not having any adults around.

Well, I didn't have anything. So between that, we lived at the school house. Anyway it doesn't matter.

But you didn't have income. You had just your brother feeding you, and that was it.

He was working for the highway department. That was it. And we had an account down at Marty's Central Market owned by Marty. Oh, that Jordan owned and Marty, I think, owned it. And they wouldn't cut me off. I went up four hundred dollars. That was a lot of money in those days. The account went up about four hundred dollars. And that's when I left, and poor old Bud was left with that bill. He finally paid it all, he said.

But that's when this family took you in.

Jake Stevenson.

OK. So you finished up high school living with that family?

Yes. And I didn't know whether I was going to graduate or not. I was like everybody else. I was screwing up, I guess. But I know come to graduation I thought, "Well, how am I going to graduate? I don't even own a suit." And my sister, who was living down in San Francisco, she sent me a seventeen dollar suit. Boy, that was the best suit I ever saw in my life! And I graduated, anyway.

And then did you go off on your own immediately after that?

And then after that I went down to Millers, I think, and then I worked for the highway department, and then I worked at Silver Peak and then down to Weepah, and then I left Nevada.

OK. And so Silver Peak, you would have been there about what years? If you graduated in 1932, 1933 . . .

I graduated in 1932 or 1933. Nineteen thirty-three, say. That summer, I guess, or 1934 . . . the summer of 1934. That's when we built that mill.

OK. That was when you were working on that mill, was the summer of 1934?

I think it was.

That's a rough estimate.

I don't think there is anybody that is living today that worked on the mill except me.

You can't think of any of the men that you worked with?

I can't think of anybody that . . . Henry Gilbert worked on it, the Chiatoviches worked on it. They're all dead. And the Gilbert that worked on it, he's dead. Fayette Hill, I don't know. He's, I think, one of the wives of Fayette's sons lives around here some place. [Fayette's son, Leon Hill, lives in Reno.] And Fayette Hill was from Goldfield. He was the master mechanic up there, and he had his family out there. But I can't think of anybody that's alive that worked on that mill.

From start to finish, as you recall, it only took three or four months to build that mill?

About three or four months to build the mill, yes.

That seemed pretty fast, did it?

Yes. And I don't know. Vollmar brought Kellogg and Cord and those people that settled down in the valley [Fish Lake Valley]. I mean Cord stayed in Nevada, you know, and Bugs Warner . . . But he brought a lot of people in there. You got to give him credit for it. He done it all himself.

Can I go back to the work that you did on the mill? Do you remember what kind of hours you put in?

Oh, we put in our eight hours, seven days a week.

Every day?

Every day.

There were no days off?



"Oh, we put in our eight hours, seven days a week . . . No days off. We just got that mill built, that's all." The Vollmar Mill as it was in 1941 is on the right. Sections of the Black Mammoth Mill are visible to the left. (Photograph courtesy of Gerry Cooper.)

No days off. We just got that mill built, that's all.

So there was no time off during that three or four months. You just built the mill.

Used to be Sundays off, but he wouldn't let us off.

Really?

Oh, old Birch wouldn't let us off Sundays. He wanted that job done and get out of there.

And get out, I see. OK.

What a guy, Birch. I'll never forget him. He was a big man. He wore about a [size] sixteen shoe, you know. He was a big man. He was the superintendent of the mill. He was a carpenter, actually.

Any other memories? Were there any accidents while you were there when they were building the mill?

No, I don't think so, unless the normal accidents you might have in There might have been accidents, I don't know. We never paid much attention in that day, because they were serious accidents. We weren't going for insurance in those days. They were serious accidents when something happened.

But you don't recall any serious ones while you were there working on the mill?

No, I don't remember any serious ones.

Did you have to wear a hard hat, or were there any safety procedures?

No, no, no.

None of that. And no insurance. Was there a doctor around nearby or . . . ?

There was in Tonopah and one down in Mina, I think.

That was the nearest if somebody needed help.

Nearest. Yes. Goldfield. Goldfield or Tonopah or Mina.

Yes. So working seven days a week, you didn't really travel around or go visit anybody or . . . ?

Oh, I didn't drive. I didn't leave that place out there. One time I come into town.

Tell me what you went on to do. What was your career, your work that you've done? Because you left Nevada and then you came back.

Well, after I left Nevada, I went down to Oakland, because my mother was down there. There was Lee Wisken and myself. I took Lee Wisken's wife, because she was going to have a baby, back to Utah—Roosevelt, Utah. And while I was gone, he quit for the two of us. We worked at Weepah. He had some money. We went on down to Oakland, and he got a Richfield Station, Fourteenth Avenue and Fourteenth Street. We never sold anything hardly, but there was a guy who used to pull in there in that truck . . . the pork truckers. And he had two trucks, and he was a forwarder. In those days, they used to have what they called forwarders and all those people. If you had a little truck, you'd go looking for a forwarder, and you'd get a load to take someplace, you know. So Lloyd was actually a forwarder, but he had his trucks of his own. So he used to go in there and buy. That's the only customer we had in that service station. [laughter] And, in fact, the service station . . . there

was Lloyd's little office, and then there was a guy who made batteries. That was all that was back of us. And one night, the driver had cow or dog food put on, and Lloyd come running in the office, and he says, "Somebody's got to take that truck to Los Angeles, because my driver quit me today."

"Well, God Almighty." So Wisken said, "I'm going back to Utah. I'm going back to my wife." And now left me in that. I thought, "Well, hell, I haven't been in that truck. I don't even know how to get into the damn thing." So his brother and I went . . . took the load anyway. And we started off for Los Angeles with a load of cow or dog food on, and I think it took us two days. We blew about four tires going down there. But, you know, in those days we used to have recaps on all of them. Everything was recapped.

And tubes?

And overloaded. And no brakes. Oh, God! And then I came back, and I started driving for him. And pretty soon I owned that outfit.

Oh, owned the trucking company?

I owned the trucking company. And I got a couple of more trucks, and we moved. And I got a couple more trucks. But when the service come up . . . when I went into the service . . .

And this was World War II?

I went over to . . . I was afraid . . . Well, they had slackers in the first part of the war. All I could think of was Dempsey was a slacker, and how they used to call it "Dempsey," because Dempsey . . . He was the honorary mayor of Tonopah. He fought in the streets there in Tonopah and fought in the streets in Goldfield. And the Goldfield Hotel was one of the finest hotels in the world. And Tex Rickard used to be down

there, had a bar down there, the longest bar in the world right on the corner. And when he left Goldfield, they went back and built Madison Square Gardens in New York and took Dempsey with him. And Jack Dempsey was born and raised in Montana.

OK. And so you went into the military as an army engineer, is that what you told me?

I just went in the military as a draftee.

Just as draftee. And so then they trained you?

They trained me. They put me in the army engineers.

And then, how did you come back to Nevada, because you spent a lot of your life here, right, in Nevada?

Let's see. I come back as a master sergeant.

After World War II?

Yes.

Yes. OK. And where did you serve in World War II?

Over in the European . . . I thought, "Well, boy, I don't have to worry about this war. This war will be practically over before I get there." Heck, the third day I walked into the beach in Omaha. The third day of the war.

I come back after the war, and I went to where I got my discharge in Beale [Camp Beale, east of Marysville, California]. And my brother Jack came in from Japan. He was out in the South Pacific. He got his discharge. He said, "Where are you going?"

And I said, "I don't know where I am going." I says, "Everybody wants me to start

my trucking, but if I do, everybody who was in the army was a truck driver.”

So he says, “Why don’t you come to Reno?” And so that’s why I got up here.

When you got back to Reno, did you ever go back to Silver Peak? Have you been back since you worked on that mill?

One time, I think.

Had it changed?

I’ve been down to Tonopah quite a bit. Oh, I used to know Hefty Sanderson. He was a very good friend of mine, you know. And then he went on . . . his brother Bill worked out there. He was down in Hawthorne, Hefty was. But his brother Bill worked down at the Peak. And his brother Bill died before Hefty died. And Hefty then become the sheriff down in Mineral County. I ran a bar down there for a while, too, afterwards, in the 1950s.

In Hawthorne?

Yes. Early 1950s, 1940s and 1950s. The reason why I wanted to go back to Hawthorne, because I thought those guys made so damn much money during the war, you know, when they built that ammunition dump out there, and the Korean War was starting. I thought, “Hawthorne is the place that’s going to have a lot of money.” But instead of that, here I got a broken-down old shack up there that belonged to my brother Jack and Louie Benetti. And my partner and I, we had to rebuild the whole darn thing. The windows were broke out of it and everything else. We built the whole place, and we had a bar in there.

I was married to a different girl, and I guess I just had a lot of fun as a kid. I don’t know. The girl that I was married to then, during the war she had her pictures up on all these billboards. I’d see . . .

She was like a model?

Yes, she was. She was drinking Coca-Cola and these other things and filling her teeth with Colgate and all that stuff, you know. And she was kind of a model. And I had a lot of fun with her. She was married to me then, but I didn’t care about nothing. You know, in those days, I was just a young guy like everybody else.

When you think back on Silver Peak, was there anything important that you learned or did then?

Oh, I think I learned all the time. All those times. From all those people. They lived in the desert. They were good people.

What would you say was the most important thing you learned or remember?

I think the best thing that I learned in school was commercial arithmetic. I could do anything. And then I went to work for the highway department, I had one of those little machines, you know, first computer come out. So I’d go like that, and I get all my stations worked out. And I went to work for the highway department. We put that road through Mina. There was two companies in there.

And we used to go in the bar, the Pastime Bar, and all those guys would come in there on a Saturday night. And somebody started a fight and that place would be . . . you think the movies are funny, you ought to see that place. [laughter] It just bust like that. So one night we got a couple of . . . Jack Walsh just died. He was a partner of mine, and he was the type that he brought his job down there. He worked for the state. And he and I got about half drunk, and there were two brothers giving him a bad time. And he said, “Let’s give them a lesson.” So we took off, and they started to run. And they run, and one brother got away, and the other

brother hid under a car. So I was on one side getting down, and he was on the other side. And old Perry White used to be the sheriff down there in Silver Peak . . . or in Mina then. And he used to have a .45. Boy, he'd shoot you just as soon as he could. I felt that something over my head, and he says, "Get up here! Get up here!"

And I thought, "Boy, that's Perry!" So I got up. And he took us up and put us in jail then. And all it was, it was a little old shack up there that had the heavy mesh wire in between the cells. And nobody was up there at all. It was just two cells that was up there. So they were in one cell, and we were in another cell, and they were cussing at us and telling us everything. So Jack Walsh, we took the legs off a potbelly stove that was on our side. We took that piece off and tore that thing down and went in and beat those guys to death. We came back and nailed them all up. The next morning, he said, "What the hell happened to these guys?"

"I don't know."

"They didn't look like this last night." Well, they were afraid to say anything. They were going to get out, too. Oh, boy, we used to have a lot of fun.

It seems like maybe we've finished with the memories of Silver Peak. Is there anything more you want to add on to Silver Peak?

No. I was just there that time.

You were just there a short time, but it was a fun time for you.

Fun time. Well, I think it was one of the good times around Silver Peak, because Silver Peak was an early camp. Then it died out. Then, Klondike [Yukon Territory, Canada] was before Tonopah, [and the Klondike strike was] between Goldfield and Tonopah [strikes]. Well, Klondike was a camp before Tonopah ever come in. Tonopah was one of the biggest silver camps in the world. There was four hundred miles worth of work in Tonopah, underground work. And anyway, that's all I've got to say about Silver Peak, I guess.

OK. Well, thank you.

Well, I didn't think anything about it.

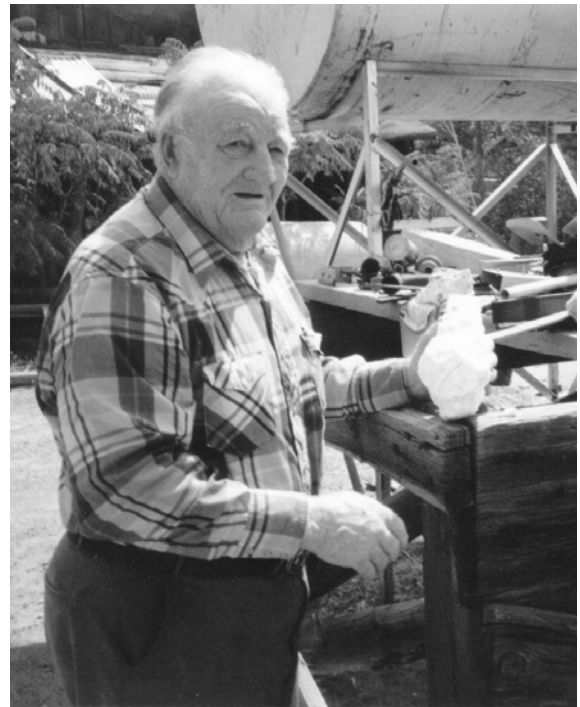
MERLE SWANSON

IN 1996 WHEN Merle Swanson was interviewed, he was recognized as one of Nevada's few remaining underground miners from the 1930s. As a child he was interested in rocks, a vocation that continued throughout his life, and at the time of the interview he still owned twenty mines. He also enjoyed sharing his passion by presenting mining workshops throughout the state. Merle's home in Mina, where he welcomed visitors from around the world, displayed a wealth of old mining equipment and ore samples. Merle's memories of Silver Peak were recorded during a day-long videotaping session at the site of the Mary Mine, the Cord Mill, and other historic remains in the Mineral Ridge Mining District. He joined Mineral Ridge Resources General Manager Tom Rinaldi and Ben Viljoen for this tour of the area.



[At times, Merle's voice was very difficult to understand due to wind and the technical difficulties of videotaping.]

VICTORIA FORD: And drove up every day, right?



MERLE SWANSON [S]: Right.

So you would have come to the office first and then gone into the mine to work?

S: Yes, we had a . . . seemed like there was a flat spot down in there where we were, where you could park the cars and stuff.

So that's changed?

BEN VILJOEN [V]: Well, they shipped that whole dump. That dump used to come way out through where this lower portal is.

S: That was a waste dump.

V: And Zephyr and Homestead shipped that. So that's probably what Yes. Zephyr got 0.5, and Homestead got 0.5. Cord shipped a little, real selectively, and it went 0.65.

S: And you know that's . . .

V: Yes, but a lot of junk in it.

S: This secretary we had, her husband run the motor. And he'd bring out the waste, and he'd run the motor right out instead of switching it down there: we had a nice place to switch them. And I told him I never wanted him to do that anymore. Well, the first thing he done was come out with the motor and done the same thing again. So I went in and asked, said, "Do I have the right to fire and hire here?"

And they said, "Yes, why, Merle?"

And I said, "I'm going to fire a bunch of men today." And he was first, and his wife was the secretary. And I handed that in and she said, "No way are you going to fire my husband. He was here a long time ago."

I said, "Well, he goes or I go." And by darn, he went, and others, too Some of them I put back to work and some I never did.

Why did you want him to go? Because he wasn't following orders?

S: No, no. I told him to switch the cars around, the waste cars that dump the waste down. We almost lost the motor a couple of times, and so I didn't want that. [If] that motor went over there, that costs thousands of dollars to replace them. But anyway, he wouldn't listen to me, and he did after that though, because he wasn't there.

Was that one of the first things you did, was change some of the employees? [Tape off]

◇

She's the one who found [the mine] then?

S: Yes. A woman found it. How this Mary Mine got it's name, was a man and a woman was out prospecting, and the woman went to get her burros, put the material on them that they used for packing. And she picked up some of the float to come off this mine, and when they panned it or whatever . . . they assayed, that's where they found out it really had good value. So then, there's where they named the mine after her, Mary Mine. That's how it got it's name. This is the understanding that I got, and this done been way back in the eighties.

1880s?

S: Eighteen-something, yes.

OK. Merle, tell me, what is the same here as when you were here in the 1930s? What do you recognize?

S: Well, I recognize the tunnel over there and that building up there and this other one over here, but our changing room and all of that has been gone. Now there, this tunnel used to come out, and we used to have an office building there and quite a lot of stuff. Our change room was there, too. And then, just off the tunnel, there was a little building there that we kept our carbide and stuff in it. And that was stuff that we had done. Of course, our blacksmith shop, that

was just on the right of it as you're looking in.

And I'd like to mention another thing. When I come up here to go to work, there was thirteen of us come up here looking for a job. And the super went by, and they said, "Fill that. Fill that."

And I thought, "Well, that's a funny thing." And he went over to the carbide room to fill his light with carbide. And I walked over there, and I said, "Ain't there a chance to go to work here?"

And he said, "Where did you come from?"

I said, "I come from Winnemucca from the Getchell Mine."

He said, "Well, who was in charge up there?"

I said, "A guy by the name of Schillings."

He said, "Did you know Schillings?"

I said, "Yes, I sure did."

He said, "You come out tonight." That's how quick I went to work. Everybody said I'd have to wait two weeks. [laughter]

But he respected Schillings' work, because he knew you were . . .

S: Yes. Well, he knew him real well and knew that I worked for him. He decided I'd get me a job, and so I did.

What did you start out doing here? What was your job?

S: I started out mucking. Yes. I was alone, and then they put me a timber man and then went along to shift boss and then right on up.

Was shift boss the last job you had here?

S: Yes. Tell you something else that took place, too, in that time. I was on night shift, and this other guy, the shift boss, was on day shift. And then it went on, and we was to change—I was to come back on to day

shift Let's see, yes, he was on night shift. And he was telling the super that this wasn't done and that wasn't done, because his men was pretty good drinkers, and they didn't like to do too much work. So I said to [the] super, I said, "Don't believe me, and don't believe him. You come around towards the end of the shift and see for yourself whether it's been done or not."

So he did. So when it was time for us to change over, he said (I think his name was Kerner), "Kerner, you're done, but," he said, "if your men wants to come out and work for Merle, that's fine. But," he said, "you're done. You know, I've been going around with Swanson towards the end of the shift, and I know what was done, and what you said is lies. It's not true. And therefore, you're out." [laughter]

Well, another time I was put in charge that I didn't expect it . . .

That you didn't expect it. How many men did you have working for you?

S: The most I ever had is somewhere around thirty-five to forty. That counted my blacksmith and all of them.

Merle, tell me what's changed now when you look at this. Besides the buildings being gone, what else is different here?

S: Well, you got so many roads. God, that's one thing. You got so many roads, and it's hard for me to recognize it. If I couldn't have seen that tunnel, and it brought back memories of what has happened here.

When you were here, was there just the one main road through?

S: We had one, yes. We just had the one road that went up to the upper levels. And most of our ore was dropped down through the raises, and we picked it up and got it out here with the train that had twelve

cars. And we'd dig right on out and dump it into the ore bin here. It all came out of that tunnel there. This was pretty level in there from the tunnel out, and we had a change room and everything, and there in the office, the secretary, she had a place over in here someplace. It might have been right there . . . I don't know, but she had a place a little ways away from the tunnel.

And once you got the ore out, how did it get to the mill?

S: It come out in ore cars. Train, yes. We had a train run by battery. And that's one reason I didn't want them to run the motor out on there when I had a train of waste cars to dump, because we almost lost a motor. And that's why I had to get rid of that guy, because he would do it every time, and whether I wanted it done or not. He didn't think I could do anything about it, but I found out I could.

OK. And so the train would bring the ore cars out, and then how did it get from there to the mill? Ran all the way?

S: Yes, ran all the way and then shot into an ore bin over here, right on [beside] the train.

OK. And did you live up here?

S: No, I lived in Silver Peak. I'll tell you a little bit about that, too. [laughter]. When my wife and I first came over there, we had a tent and everything, and I said to my wife, I said, "Where would be a good place to go?" because you [could] park about anywhere.

And she said, "Oh, I'd like to be down there where that big tree is."

And I went down there, and there was four or five guys there and I said, "You guys got this ground here?"

They said, "We got squatter's rights. We own this lot."

I said, "How much will it take for you guys to move off?"

Said, "A quart of whiskey." [laughter] I went and got the quart of whiskey, and we built a house on that property. [laughter] And we moved that house up to Hawthorne.

Hawthorne, when the mines closed down in 1942?

S: Yes, yes. That's down there where the store used to be, over across there. [Tape off]



V: They're working on the road right now.

S: Oh, I see.

V: They're going to be hauling a bunch of the equipment for the leach pads up in that direction, so the roads all got to be widened and straightened out. Be a pretty nice road. Probably the best one in the county. [laughter] Did you ever work up at Oromonte and up in there?

S: When I went to a place, I don't know, for some reason they took a liking to me, and I had no reason to quit and go to another one. [laughter]

V: The Oromonte. It's up on the ridge up here.

S: No.

V: I almost did. Steve Cate and I camped out up there for three weeks, and, oh, we were going to start up in just a couple of days when the compressor shows. A couple of days so . . .

S: Yes, I figure you get a few of the people would like to. I wouldn't mind come on over and show some of these tapes like the one that I showed you.

Yes.

S: Yes, let people know more about mining. And I was in Silver Springs last Saturday, because so many people . . . they think a miner's it. And if it wasn't for the miner, we wouldn't even have clothes, see, or houses or nothing else to live in. But they don't know that, and we got to educate them people and let them know that.

That's what Tom was just saying on the way up, that that's still the biggest . . . People just don't understand how mining is a part of our lives.

S: No. We can't do without it. Another one's a logger. We can't do without him. And one's a miner, but one has to be first. Well, we all know it's a miner here, but up in Idaho they said, "No, it's the farmer."

I said, "Now listen, guys, how in the world would you tear up the ground if you didn't have a plow or a drill or anything to do it?" They said, "You know, Mr. Swanson, we'd get a big log and drag it."

I said, "OK, how would you get the log?"



National? Where is it from the National?

S: Well, Nevada Miners & Prospectors, and that's down in Silver Springs. We have a meeting . . . sometimes they play some tapes down there.

But where do you get your tapes?

S: [?] Department, Mineral Division out of Carson City.

Out of Carson City, and he takes them all over Nevada and shows them to people?

S: Yes. And, oh, they thank me. I know a lot of people after they see it, they thank me for letting them have it, so it can be showed. Well, with all these minerals

running out of my ground, my plan is to take these minerals out of my ground every year. And it's like the doctor just saying down there in Carson . . . in Las Vegas. I said, "You know, people, it's like having money in the bank. As long as you got money in the bank, you'll get interest on your money. The more money, the more interest. Same things are going towards ground today. If the plan is out to get these minerals and it's not on the ground to be had, then they give you whatever they can. This would clear up a lot of your sicknesses today."

Merle, when did you start mining? You were telling a story about when you were a kid.

S: Oh, I started mining . . . looking for rocks when I was three years old up in the state of Montana. I was born in the state of Montana at Bozeman. And my folks had a place out in the hills, and I was out looking for rocks, me and my little dog. And I'd get tired of walking, I'd lay down and take a nap. And he, my little dog, would stay with me, little fox terrier. When my folks would start looking for me, they would start a hollering, and [the] little dog would go down and get them and bring them up there where I was. And then I'd get a whipping, and [they'd] say, "Now you cannot do that any longer. You cannot do that anymore. Something will get you." Well, as soon as they'd turn their back, I'd do it again. I've been that way all my life.

Interested in the rocks all your life.

S: Yes, I just can't help it. I'm just that way. And I don't have one mine, I've got over twenty mines. It's hard to believe.

Twenty mines right now that you still work?

S: Yes. Twenty. I've got six marble mines.

How did you get your training before you came to the Mary Mine?

S: I just started. I guess it come to me. And then I was out there at the Mary . . . at the Jumbo Mine and the Getchell Mine and . . .

And you just worked your way up?

S: I even worked in Tybo over here. Tybo, Nevada, and about . . . I might even tell you a little thing that took place over there one time.

Well, why don't we save that story about Tybo. Tell me when you first came to the Mary. What was happening here?

S: Well, they had a crew of men working and everything. And when I'd go asking for a job, they'd give me a job. And they put me amucking. I was able to do what they asked me to do, and wasn't long they put me timbering, and from there I went to shift boss and right on up the line.

Is this where you went in to work every day, right here?

S: Yes, yes.

This is the main entrance.

S: Yes, when I first went to work, but there was a tunnel here. Yes, where I started to work was in this tunnel here, but I have worked on all of the other levels up above, off and on. And then, when they put me over the crew of men, then, of course, I had all the levels to take care of. I don't know. I just loved that kind of work. I loved that kind of work, and the better metal grades we could get, the better I felt.

Did you have somebody telling you where to work in there, or did you decide?

S: Oh, yes, yes. They had people working here when I went to work. And they put me in there working, and it wasn't long, I was running the machine. And there was timber men, and they were pushing me on up [to] shift boss and on up the line.

And they had geologists sometimes deciding where you should work. Is that right?

S: Well, there are geologists that tell them where the ore was at. And seems like the guy's name was Wilford, but I'm not sure about that.

OK. Were there times that you disagreed with the geologists?

S: Oh, yes, a lot of times. I can tell you about the one that was up on the upper level. That was on the 950 level. We mined that pretty well all out, and I asked the super, I said, "Where do you think we ought to put those men?"

He said, "Well, put them down there where the slushers . . ." The slushers is what you use to pour the ore into the chutes.

And I said to myself, and I looked it over, "Now, it don't make sense to go this way. I'm going to go the other way." So I went the other way. I found some pretty good . . .



And it's very small up there. And I thought, "Well maybe I'd like to see what's underneath here." So we started, and about the third or fourth day, he'd went up, and he'd come in behind me. I said to him—we were talking in one of these upper levels, and I said, "Is that where you want to put the men?"

He said, "No Merle," he said, "I told you down where the slusher is."

I said, "Did you change my men?"

He said, "No, I wouldn't bother your men. I don't bother any of your men." So the next morning I went up there after we blasted, and we had about a foot, maybe two foot of ore coming in the back. And I hurried up and got a sample down, so it would go through the assay office. We'd get it that afternoon. And when we got it, he said, "Where did you get that sample from up there?"

And I said, "In there where you told me not to go." [laughter]

He said, "Did you change your men?"

I said, "No. I thought we ought to have another round." So the next morning we had eight foot that run over two ounces, and I could get thirty, forty, or fifty ton a day out of there with about three or four men. Because we all just set up the machines and slab it. And then they went on for several years.

When Cord took over it was up here on the other levels, up on the intermediate, I believe it was, and when I was shift boss for the Black Mammoth. And it was a roll that come in there, and they all figured that roll cut that ore off, but I didn't think so. But when Cord took it over, that was the first thing I done was a tunnel right in there, and I wanted to go up through the tunnel and go up in there again to where that ore was supposed to be. And when Cord took it over, that was the first thing I tried to do. But geologists said that roll cut that ore off. But anyway, after I found this other up on the 950 level, then Cord and the super's sitting there one day, and they got atalking, and they said to me, "Merle, where is another good sweetener in there?"

And I said, "Down there in the Drinkwater where you told me not to go."

He says, "Well, the geologists say that roll cut that ore off."

Well I said, "I don't think so."

And he said, "If you don't think so, you go ahead."

And I said, "Well, I don't have a miner to put in there right then."

So I took a mucker, and I got the machine and everything, and I'd go around over to these other places and get in there, and I'd drill a round, blasted in there, and I'd have that guy getting everything ready so I could go ahead and drill another one that night. About the second or third day the super run by, and he run up in there. He said, "Now, Merle, you told me you didn't have a miner to put in there." He said, "The best miner on the hill is up there." [laughter] I didn't tell him it was me that was drilling that. Well, when we got up in there, the ore was there just like I told them. So the roll doesn't cut it off. And I had two-ounce . . . a lot of places I had two-ounce ore.

So after you did this a couple of times, did the superintendent trust your intuitions?

S: Oh, yes. Whatever I wanted to do, I always had full go-ahead and do it. And . . . yes.



You were working in here, and you were the shift boss?

S: Yes, and then there's one guy, and I liked him very well, and he was a good worker and everything, but he was getting into his seventies. And I asked him one day, I said, "What were you going to do when you get too old to work and ain't got any money to keep you?" I said, "You'll have [it] all spent."

He said, "I wish the heck I'd fall down and break my neck, and," he said, "I hope I don't have any money left." And so that's the story you get. And I'll go on with his story later . . .

This one day he came out, and he had been drinking pretty well. And I didn't notice it until I took him on up there to the Drinkwater level. I wanted to go to . . . No,

I take it back. It was 950 level. When he got out of pickup, I could tell then, and he wasn't too good. And I took him, I told him to get back in there, and he said, "No, why?"

And I said, "You've been drinking. I don't want you in the mine that way."

He said, "Oh, I'm all right."

And I said, "No, you're not." I said, "You get in the pickup and come back, and I'll take you down." I brought him down here to the office, and he went in and told the what's-his-name that he had been fired.

And the super said, "Well, what did Swanson tell you?"

He said, "He told me to never come out this way again."

"Well," he said, "he didn't fire you, but you better not come out that way again, or you will get fired." And so the next day when he came out, he was good. He was good all the time after that.

Well . . . when Cord done shut this mine down (I don't know, I think it was Big Pine. I was working in a lead mine over there, because I couldn't get to work in this gold mine), [this guy] went downtown. He had been down there drinking for a week, and then he got on the pickup to go back up to the mine, and he done just what he wanted: he fell off that pickup and broke his neck.

And he didn't have any money?

S: Yes, he didn't have any money, I'm sure, because he was drinking. He probably had a few bills maybe. I don't know.

Why didn't you want men who were drinking to work in there?

S: Why didn't I want them? Because it's dangerous. Very, very dangerous for anybody that drinks to ever be underground or anywhere else.

Describe what's dangerous about the underground work?

S: Well, if you're sober and watch yourself, well, it's like anything else outside. It's not as dangerous as you think it is. I've had . . . I've had . . . we've lost one man up here, but . . . if they had done what I wanted them to do, we wouldn't have lost them, I don't believe. You see, that hanging wall was pretty loose, and so we had a lot of good ore underneath there. And what I wanted to do is to clean that ore up as quick as you can and then blast that down. And the super and them said, "No, I think what we ought to do is timber it." When they went to timber it, that darn deal broke and fell down, knocked him down off there, and it made him paralyzed, so he died in about a week. The other guy run clear out of the mine.

That's the kind of danger if you don't take the right . . .

S: Well, it's dangerous. But when I worked up here in the intermediate level, when I was working in with the timber man, we were trying to hold that stope from falling down. That stope was a big, open underground deal. And we was trying to hold that, and it's nothing to have a timber line here underneath there, and that timber's breaking while you're trying to put another one in trying to hold it. And I got a scar here, on this finger here, where this sliver came off of one of them and tore my thumb pretty near off. But there was nobody in there, only me and the other guy. They wouldn't allow nobody to go in there. It was dangerous in there working, but you have to know what you're doing and . . .

OK. Were there any other kinds of accidents in there?

S: Well, we've had some guy get hurt but not very bad. This . . . I think his name was Axel Anderson. No, I think it was Carl House. They was eating lunch, and he was talking about what fingers would you get the

most money out of, if you lost one, through the [state disability] insurance. And they told him it would have been better if he didn't lose that finger. [laughter] Got a little shivery or something to get off of those. [laughter] It wasn't his money. I don't know.

But for the most part, you didn't have a lot of accidents?

S: No, no. I can say I never had very many people ever get hurt. Because anybody wanted to get hurt, I wanted to be the one to take that responsibility.

When you were shift boss, what was the day like? What did you have to do every day?

S: The miner has to put in what they call a round. He has to drill so many holes. Well, like in that tunnel in there, drill so many holes and blast out. They have now mucking machines, but in those days we had slick sheets. And we'd put a little dirt on there when the concussion from the blast [came], and then [keep it from] blowing the plate [metal plate or slick sheet] up, and then it would all be on there, and it was easy to muck it off [onto] their car. But I told the mucker that has to shovel, would [he] clean that out. That way the miner could go ahead, because They go across and put the machine on there, and they could drill all of these holes except the two on the bottom and maybe the two relievers. And then he'd shoot it. But during the day, see, that mucker could be getting this out of the way. Right after that you'd have it all cleaned up, and then they could put the two . . . well, they usually put about five holes in the bottom, because that's the receivers, and then there's three lifters, what they called lifters.

And then, after that was all done, that's when you would fire the dynamite?

S: Yes. Well, that was your drift. But now your raise is where you'll go up. Or a winze is where you'd go down. Or a shaft is where you go straight down. But we never had no shafts here. We had some winzes but no shafts, vertical down. We had a lot of raises, a lot of drift work. But most vertical shafts that I knew of . . .



S: I come here in Nevada in 1936.

And did you come to the Mary Mine?

S: Well, I didn't come right to the Mary Mine. I worked at Tybo, Nevada, out there until they shut down in September. And then it wasn't long until I was over here at the Mary Mine. I don't remember what month, but . . .

But it was still 1936?

S: Well, I'd say 1937. Maybe 1936 or 1937.

And how long were you here [at the Mary Mine]?

S: I was here until 1942, to July.

And what happened then that you left?

S: Well, because we couldn't get powder and stuff. The war had broke out in December. In 1941 we couldn't get powder to operate the mine and a lot of other things, so we had to close the mine down, and I was working for Cord at that time.

Describe what it's like to close the mine down. What did you do?

S: Well, Cord had us pull all the rail and pipe out of the mine, because he figured the war would go on for several years, and he didn't want to leave the pipe and rail in there for some reason I don't know. But anyway,

he asked us to pull it out, and we started taking it out of there about sometime in January, February. We didn't get it all out of there until . . . I think it was in July.

Merle, describe to me what it's like to be in one of those stopes.

S: Well, it's a wonderful thing to be in one of those stopes, I think. To go in there and see all this beautiful ore, that you realize how bad the country needs it. And know that our heavenly father put it there for us for a purpose, and that was for us to survive on this earth, to put people to work. And we needed the material, too, to do a lot of different things. If it wasn't for the gold, we'd never have been able to get to the moon. And right now we have enough gold produced to make a string clear down the whole United States.

Describe . . . if you were to take me in there right now, what would it look like? What would that feel like?

S: Well, hard to say. Depends on the . . . I presume it's just like about the way we left it. And maybe some cases where, over the years, that fell down and it has caved in on us. But . . . and again on the rule of this thing, it stood up pretty well. And on your back above your ore is what they call a hanging wall, and some of them calls it the roof. Now in a coal mine they call it the roof, and [a] hard-rock mine calls it the hanging wall. And on the rule, those hanging walls is thick stuff, like it's cement. It's got a pretty slick thing, and it's easy to pull the ore away from the hanging wall. And by blasting it, you don't want to use too much powder, but you want to use enough powder that you can be able to do it—that you'd be able to move it out without, you know, too much concussion. You put, oh, let's say . . . a box of powder into one round, fill it full of powder, and then shoot it all at one time.

And you could raise heck with all the rest of the mine, too, because that concussion would blast a lot of things out. I've seen it in different mines where they would even break timber with that concussion. But you could talk to a person, know whether he's a miner or not [by what he says] about how much powder to use.

What's it like when that powder goes off?

S: It's nothing. You get your "boof! boof! boof!" But you don't shoot them all at one time. You shoot what you call the cuts. Now, your cuts are where you drill your holes down, and then you have the relievers that comes up underneath. Or you could put a burn cut in; and you drill all these holes together, five, and you shoot the middle hole first, and then these other holes will go where this other one went off. And that's what they call a burn cut. We did that, too.

So it's a series of explosions, not just one sound?

S: No, not all of it at one time. No.

Does it smoke? Is it scary at all?

S: Well, no. It don't bother you any. It makes some smoke, but it soon gets out. Especially where you . . . This mine here has so much opening going on up to the surface that it gets rid of the smoke. The air down there is a little cooler than what you got here. But in the winter it's quite a lot warmer inside. [laughter]

It's such a pleasant place to work.

S: Yes, it is. It's a nice place to work. I love it all the time. I've been like that all my life, and I still love it.



"It's a nice place to work. I love it all the time. I've been like that all my life, and I still love it." The Mary Mine, Silver Peak, Nevada, c. 1914-1915. 1. Office; 2. Hospital (small, one room); 3. Boardinghouse; 4. Bunkhouse; 5. Cord Mill. Blair is over the hill from the water tanks marked "XX." The cinder cone is in the rear on the left. The tunnel going through the mine is at the bottom of the photo. (Photograph courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society, Acc. # ESM 805.)

Tell me about the different kinds of mining. What method of mining were you using in here?

S: Well, we used all different kinds. We drove drifts, we had our stopes, we had raises, we had winzes going.

Could you describe the difference between each one of those?

S: Oh, yes. A drift is where you're running in pretty level. They usually run just a little bit uphill, so that way you don't have to push a loaded car uphill when you're coming out. And . . . that's your drift. And

then a winze is when you're going down on an angle, and a shaft is where you go straight down, and you have to use different methods about mucking like that. Now, we didn't have any in here, but the place where I worked—the shaft—we had to muck that all by hand into a bucket, and then they hoisted the bucket up and then dumped it. And you'd have to do that pretty well with the winze, too, or you [would be] shaking the rims. But the winze (I'll show you one of those winze buckets, and maybe I did) it's got a deal on it where they slide up on the timber. And then, when it gets up to where the ore bin is, it automatic dumps itself right in there. And then you let the cable loose,

and it goes back down the hole for another trip.

You mentioned shrink mining and some other methods. What are those?

S: Well, you mean shrinkage? Shrinkage is where you got an ore body laying pretty well vertical. It can be, oh, sixty degrees, but it's got to be so that the ore will run by itself. And all you do is run a tunnel underneath there, and you build your ore chutes there. You don't have to muck on any of that there, and it all comes down in your chute. And you run what you call a raise up, right into the stope. Every time you blast, you have to raise that a little bit more so you have a way of getting out of there. And it's the cheapest way there is to mine, because you don't have to muck any of it.

But if you break a hundred tons a day, you can't take that hundred tons out. You only can take out maybe twenty or thirty ton out of that place, or maybe a little more, because you just pull that ore down there so that you have a place about six feet between the ore and the hanging wall to work with the ore body—the width of the hanging wall. And that's the way you go. And that's the cheapest way there is to mine. I don't care.

I liked to have got a big open pit. Like I have this trace mineral. All I had to do is load it up and take it in. That's a good way. But where you got veins to work on, I think it's [shrinkage is] just the cheapest way to mine.

Are there other methods that you've seen?

S: Well, yes. You got what they call cut and fill. You take the ore out, and then you have to haul it on the side of the hill to get waste to fill this place up. And then you raise your timber. And then you can blast on top of this waste again, and that's not good, because you're always losing some ore where there's waste. And when you get the

ore out, then you have to go get some more waste to fill in. And that's what they call cut and fill.

OK. Is there anything else, any other method that you can describe to us, or are those the two main ones?

S: Well, and then, of course, you're mining on a stope where the stuff is not steep enough to run, and you have to muck it. But nowadays they got these slushers in there, and so they just pull it over to the chute where they're at, and that's pretty cheap to mine like that. I've done mining here with the slusher. That's all we had, a lot of slushers. We had mucking machines in here.

So you didn't have to muck by hand in here?

S: Well, we did. Some place I was in had the mucker machines, and mucking machines were run by air.

OK. I want to take a minute here to talk about mucking, because you won some championships in mucking.

S: Yes, in fact I hold the world's record of shoveling a ton of stuff. And they figure about a ton of stuff in to the ore car. My best time is forty-eight seconds.

And how many years did you win this thing?

S: Oh, I've done it several years. And I used to do it just for the heck of it, you know, and they didn't keep records of it. But when I began to do it, and then when I had beaten the other people so much, then they began putting me down on records. I know a lot of times I'd have (up in these upper levels where we didn't have the mucking machines, and we was running a tunnel in

there or drift) a new guy, and he'd have an awful time about loading them cars out. So I'd come by and, "Would you want me to give you a hand?"

He said, "I sure would." I could see he wasn't going to get it out in time so we could blast. So, "I'll let you push the cars when I load them, and you give me cars." And I could load them faster than he could get them out, because a minute was pretty good for me to load a car. And they said, "You know, Merle, you can load them much faster than I can pull them out of the chute." [laughter]

How old were you when you won your last championship?

S: Well, it was 1991, and this is 1996. So I imagine I was about seventy-nine.

What's the closest to your record?

S: Oh, then, about two minutes away. Yes, they took minutes, and I took seconds.

I can tell you another story that . . . This one guy was talking to these other guys over there, one of those big places over in California, and there was fifty-six of them competing against me that day, and there was two of them had had a heart-attack, the young guys. They come out of it all right. And this one guy said, he was telling these other guys, he said, "You know, they don't know how to muck." He said, "You have to get ahead of your car and shovel over your right shoulder, your left shoulder."

I said, "It looks like to me that would be a lot of hard work."

He said, "It is old man, but . . ." he said, "I'll show you how to do it." And he didn't know me. And so when I beat him, two minutes, he wouldn't have nothing to do with me. He wouldn't talk to me, have nothing to do with me. He said, "When I get there, old man, I'll show you." And that's

what I did. Well, then I mucked after him, and he wouldn't have nothing to do with me no more.

You think they just didn't have the kind of practice that you had?

S: That's right. That's right. I done it all my life and . . . yes, I done it all my life. And I was also pretty good in the heavyweight arm wrestling, too. And wheelbarrow race, I missed that out on two seconds one time. But when you go ahead and arm wrestle and muck and then take on the wheelbarrow, all four of them and one right after the other one, you kind of get tired. [laughter]

Tell me what you were best known for. What were you best at when you were mining? What was your best skill?

S: Well, I don't know. I think my best deal was to be able to realize where the ore was at without seeing it.

Yes. How did you do that?

S: Well, I don't know. It just come to me. I had that theory what it should be, and I'd do it. And I can't help it. I've still got it today.

You still can do that?

S: I still got it today. I'll have it until, I guess, I die. I thought all people were that way, but they say, "No, no." I know now none of my family was that way.

Where did you get that? Did your father mine?

S: No. My dad was a mining partner in a mine, and my brothers and sisters, none of them were miners. But it just happened to

be born in me, and I'm very happy with it . . . the way it turned out to be.

OK. Merle, you did underground mining here, right?

S: Yes, it was all underground mining.

And you told me once something about the Mary Mine—that you thought it was best suited [for underground mining]. Can you explain that?

S: Oh, yes. I still say that. I say that this here mine has to be under[ground] mined, because you take an open pit, and you get too much waste with your ore, which lowers the grade too much, and it's not an open-pit mine—it's underground. Now there's a lot of places that it's an open pit, but you see these stopes are not big underground. If they was four or five hundred feet wide, yes. Yes. But they're not. About eight, ten feet—that's a pretty good-size stope. That's the way the ore bodies are. But there's good ores here. They're darn good ores here. I think you're going to have to underground mine it.

When you left, when E.L. Cord shut this down, you knew there was still good ore here?

S: Oh, yes. We wasn't out of ore. No.

Can you explain that a little bit more? You weren't out of ore. Why did you shut down?

S: No, we wasn't out of ore when we shut the mine down—just because you couldn't get at things to operate it. And we had two holes in ore that we had—one down over here, and then there's one up on the upper level that was in pretty good ore. But we never did do any work to get to the ore. And then there's other holes that we had in there, too. Oh, yes. There's still a lot of good ore here. Yes, I don't doubt that one bit.

You'd like to get back down in there?

S: [laughter] Well, I'd like to go in there and see, but I'm getting up in my years. I've got other things I got to do now, and I'm trying to get this trace-mineral mine again . . .

And you also go around and do some educational work. Tell me what you do.

S: Well, sometimes they call me in and have me give lessons in schools in mining. And then the Department of Mineral Division, they furnish to me these tapes and stuff, and they liked what I do, and I know the teachers. They ask, "When can we get you back?" when I leave there, so I guess I must be letting them know a little bit they should know, because they really should know about mining. So many people have no idea about mining.

Because the tapes really tell how . . .

S: Yes. You saw one of them and how important it is. We wouldn't have never got to the moon if we hadn't had gold. And there's a lot other things that we'd never have been able to do if you hadn't had these minerals. [tape off]

◇

Your parents . . . your mom died when you were young?

S: When I was ten.

And what happened to you then?

S: My dad deserted me, and some people up in Idaho raised me. And I used to go out in the hills herding sheep when I was eleven years old, twelve years old. And I was all over the darn hills picking up these rocks. I wished I knew then what I know now. I bet I'd find a lot of ore up there.

Yes. How did you leave these people that helped raise you?

S: Well, I figured I was an old man. I was sixteen years old, and I met this girl. She was fourteen, and I went over to this one aunt where she was staying. They sent her over to Jackson Hole [Wyoming], and this was in Victor, which was only twenty-some miles away. So I went over there, and I found her. And it wasn't long we was engaged, and it wasn't long we was married. But her aunt and uncle took off. While they was took off for a couple of weeks, we got married, and then that woman was so mad at me when she come back That was my wife's aunt.

Your wife was named Margaret?

S: Yes.

You were married to her how long?

S: Fifty-six years. She liked mining, too.

Why did she like it?

S: Well, I guess we both kind of liked it.

So, did the two of you go out prospecting together?

S: Oh, yes. She worked underground with me.

What did she do?

S: Well, help me get powder and stuff, you know. [pause]



Was this the same hat that you wore?

S: Well, I think I did. I'm pretty sure this is one of the hats. It's the same kind of a light that I had. This is a carbide light, and

this is good for about two hours, two and a half, three hours after filling it. And then the light will go low, and then you have to take it, and you fill it with carbide. And then you carry your carbide in your pocket, and then you have a water jug here in the mine. You fill it up with water, and then it's good for another two or three hours. But if you get in where it's drafty, this light starts going out, you better get out of there, too, because it ain't good for you to [have] this doused.

Was there good ventilation in the Mary Mine?

S: Oh, yes, because there's an opening that goes right on up to them other levels. It's just like being in a house with both doors open.

Was there water piped up here? How did you get your water?

S: Well, no, we had to carry our water. They had water piped up to the mill, yes, from way down in the plant, yes.

To the Cord Mill?

S: Yes.

And did you get that water into the mine? Or you had to carry that in?

S: Yes, we had the water piped in. We drilled off that. In some places we had what we call pressure tides . . . fill these tides up with water. You have to maybe carry it in to fill it in these tides. Then you use so much water when you're drilling. That way you don't get any of that dust.

Did you have to wear masks to keep the . . . ?

S: No, no.

Did you have trouble with silicon dust?

S: No. No.

You didn't have any problem breathing?

S: No, no. You know, when I went to work at these mines, the doctors I heard that this miner's consumption, this . . . dust and stuff, would kill you, so I went and talked to a doctor. And he said, "Merle," he said, "miners made good money. What they do is they don't take care of themselves. They drink, and they smoke, and neither one of them's any good for you. And this is what really causes it to come on." So I listened to what he said, and I didn't do that. I got rid of that, and here I am, I'm going to be eighty-four pretty quick, and I still can go in there and drill a round and muck out. So I know a lot of people even nowhere near as close as I am [who are] not able to do that. So I feel . . . the mining never did hurt me, no.

The first thing . . . what I done is come up where we changed clothes in the change room, and then we got ready. In a certain time we'd have to be going to work. And then fill these lights, our building right in here where we'd fill the lights in a carbide room. And then we'd walk back in there to wherever we was going, and we'd had a certain place and a certain number that we had to go by. And they called it, and it's on the maps too, where we were working. We knew what we had to do, of course.

MARK GANDOLFO [G]: You want to walk up there and just show me?

S: Yes. As I see it, walking in here, they have never went in here with a pipe, rails, or nothing since the time that I left here. Therefore, any of this ore was back in the mine that I was working on, I presume it's still there, because I don't see any signs

where they had the rail put back or the pipe lines or anything.

G: So that's the way it was when you left it?

S: When we left it, we had pulled everything out, yes. But we had a pipeline going in there different places where we'd . . . be able to hook on to our machines to drill the ground that we needed to drill. It's very educational to know these things about mining I don't think we put this door on it. That door has been put on since I left here. I don't know. You've been here.

You see, we never timbered this. The ground is close, stand up pretty good. You don't have to worry about it. If you get here at the door, you can feel the air coming down. That's why you got good clean air in here. You feel the air coming out of there? Yes.

G: Can you say that again. Can you step back that way just a little bit? The wind's blowing on your microphone there. It's coming out of there so much. So, yes, go ahead and describe to me . . .

S: Well, like I state again, talking about mining before. Now this mine, there was places where we'd have bad air for a while until we drilled through into where we get into some of the air that was coming down. This air is coming down from up above. And this air, as you noticed, is just a little cooler than it is outside. But the winter time, the air gets fairly warm. It's not so that you can't work. It's just right. It's just the right temperature to work underground. And, as I see it, the tunnel is still as it was when we left here. You see the timbers? There's no timbers in here, and you didn't need no timbers, because it's going to be like this a million years from now, unless you get an earthquake to shift the ground. Otherwise, it's going to stay as it is. And this tunnel goes

back here quite a ways, and then it shifts, and one goes one way, and one goes the other way. When we was mining up above, we got the ore down through into these chutes, and then we'd load the [cars], fill the cars up, take them right out here, and take them to the mill.

G: You had mentioned the figure before, money-wise. How much money do you think came out of here?

S: Over five million dollars while Cord had it. I don't know how much over. But anyway, he had told me at one time, it was over five million being taken out. But he didn't say how much expense he'd added to that.

G: Can I get you to shut the door?

S: Yes. You can feel it when you shut the door. Yes.

[Cord Mill, lower level] We probably won't come back again here, but we'll get some long shots probably.

V: And then that Chapel stope, it looks like they went through hell and high water trying to hold that. Sticking over the bank there's an ore bin, and the old road used to come down, and it went right to that ore pass right here.

S: That 950, where we took that big ore . . . much ore out. And it wasn't too good, that 950, but the one that I found next door was where that two-ounce one was. And I have no idea where it was now. I have no idea.

THOMAS R. RINALDI [R]: Now, still you can go in the shovel level and then climb down and come all the way through the Mary level and out.

S: I'll be darned.

V: That's right here. [indicating on a map] And then that takes you . . . Well this raise right inside the portal takes you down through those big stopes, and the Drinkwater where they have square sets, and then you just worm your way on down to the Johnny level, the intermediate level. Yes, this is that 602 level. That's under the Chapel. And then from there, there's the Hell raise that takes you back to the Wasson. And then from there, see, you can either go down through this stope to the Mary, or there are a whole bunch of man-ways.

S: I wonder why they didn't go in where we left off and keep on going?

V: Where'd you guys leave off?

S: Down there we left everything. We didn't think about pack or railing there, but the ore's there.

V: On these upper levels?

S: Down on the lower levels, too. There's two winzes down there anyway.

V: Right. There's one that's right there off the Mary. That's the 399 winze. And then over on the other map, over the 366, which is in the Cord stope or the 340T stope, that goes down four levels. Or, nobody's done a thing down on those levels.

S: No. I don't think the pipe or rail or none of that's ever been put back in there.

V: No, no.

S: I wonder why Cord didn't go ahead with it?

V: There was a report that . . . That geologist, Kenneth Wilson, that you were

talking about, wrote up a little report after the war saying that the price of labor was too high, and the price of gold hadn't come down. So, but the way I understood was that they intended to come back through the Hill tunnel and come in from way down in the canyon and tie into the C level of the 366 winze. And they were going to concentrate on from the Mary level down and then leave this area up in here to leasers. That's the way I understood it. I may be haywire.

S: Man, it sure changed since I left here. [Sound of map being folded]



S: This here's the Mary Tunnel. See how far that darn thing goes back in there.

V: That's only part of it. Where you guys were just standing, see, and you come in, either head back to the Drinkwater end this way, or you can go Yes. And that big huge In fact, it used to be called the 340T stope, and nowadays everybody calls it the Cord stope. And here's that big winze. And then they have another winze off the B level right here—the 199. And then this one here. See, and there's our decline coming down, and then we were going to drift over and tie into the B level right there and then ramp down and come back around and hit the C level.

S: You know, they had me over there to Goldfield a while back, and I was out on that Well, I got a mine there in Goldfield, too—gold mine. And there was about, oh, maybe forty, fifty feet underneath the old tunnel, and the timber was coming down. In those days when they was working their mines, they had ore more than .20 that they couldn't do nothing with it. And that's what they . . . did a lot of that stuff. Yes.

V: Yes, same story here. See all that rubble as the . . . stope, and you can see the stope fill underneath it. Nowadays that's

good ore. I'm going to get these put away. Yes. On top of the mountain, the Oromonte, there's a basin up in there that's just natural They drilled a well . . . water up there so . . . Then their . . . upper benches . . . those haul roads down into the lower part.

S: I always said that there was gold

R: We'll find it then, Merle

V: Of course, when you guys were mining in here, what we're calling ore today, you called dirt. [laughter]

S: Yes, yes, right.

V: Wouldn't even make waste.

R: Wouldn't even make waste, yes.

S: No. No, anything in ten hundreds, we tore it out.

R: Yes, we call that high grade now.

S: Yes.



S: Well, if you see somebody who wants a copper mine, gold mine, silver mine, I got them. Anybody . . . but I got what's called the Black Warrior, and we shipped that ore that went over three ounces. But then I'm trying to get my trace-mineral mine going, and we got some orders coming up from Brazil. I hope we can be able to get it built.

V: Over by Mina?

S: Yes. They're using that for everything—eyesight, cancer, and everything. Everything that's wrong with people. And the reports that come back, well, I can't hardly believe what it's done to people.

I laughed, I was up in Idaho a few years back. This woman says to me, she says, "You know, Merle, I wish to hell there was something I could give my husband to get him off of that couch. All he wants to do is to lay on that damn couch all the time."

I said, "Lady, I've got some stuff in the car. I won't guarantee it will help you, but I would sure have him to try it." So I come back to Nevada, and I give him a little bag of it, and about, oh, a couple of weeks she called me up, and she said, "Now Merle, how in the hell do I get him back in the house? He wants to work all the time." [laughter] He must have took an overdose of it.

V: [laughter]

S: That's the type in the back of my pickup—them bags there. Yes, I give a lesson in school a while back, and I gave each one of the teachers a little bag of it. And it wasn't long and that one teacher called me up, and she said, "Merle, where can I get another bag of that?"

I said, "I'm going to Fallon, and I'll drop you off a bag." So I went ahead and dropped her off a bag, and in about a week I got a nice card, and she said, "You know, Merle, I used to have a hard time keeping up with my students. Now," she said, "I'm way ahead of 'em." [pause]

Are you going back in here further?

V: No. This is the granite footwall. What they're going to do is take it out that direction.

S: Oh.

R: It's a little bit off the footwall side, just so we got room to get in here with the trucks and things. [Tape off]



Merle, tell me about Silver Peak when you got to town?

S: Well, there's a lot of things that took place in Silver Peak. I remember this one night these two guys got in a fight there in town, and the one guy, he took a knife, and he cut the [other] guy's stomach open. And this other guy that was watching there, he run down to his house as fast as he could. He didn't have time to explain to his wife what happened. He wanted a bed sheet. So they thought they'd gone crazy. And he grabbed the bed sheet off of there, and he ran back up, and they wrapped the guy in it, and they took him to Tonopah, and they saved his life. So when the guy come back (his name was Swanburg) his wife and daughter had moved out of the house. He was pretty well liquored up, and he started throwing things out of the house. [laughter] I think it was the bed was what he had to throw out next. And when they couldn't get it through the door, and there's a water bucket there full of water, and [so] he took that water, and he threw it out the window. And it run right through his window and right through a trailer house that had parked there. And this damn woman, they . . . crawled out of the bed, but the little girl got the water that was thrown over the bed. [laughter]

I said to the guy the next morning, I said, "Why didn't you hit him and stop that?"

He said, "Merle, I couldn't. He was weaving too much." [laughter] Oh, that was quite a deal. But anyway, they saved the guy's life by doing that, and that was the right thing to do. But he didn't have time to think he could go ahead and explain all of it to his wife, because he had to get back with that bed sheet to wrap this guy up.

Was the nearest doctor in Tonopah?

S: There was one here in Mina, I mean Silver Peak, for just a little while, but I don't think there was one then. But anyway, they take them to Tonopah.

Was there quite a bit of drinking in town?

S: Oh yes, yes, yes. I imagine there still is. [laughter] A lot of drinking goes on.

What other things? Were there community picnics or anything?

S: Oh, yes. Well, I'll tell you, when we get a new man hired up here to the mine, these other guys would get a hold of them and tell them about these two young girls was down there, and we had a place off there towards where the old airport is. And these girls' father was supposedly working at the Nivloc.

"And now, we can go down there and see them. And they're really nice girls, but we'll have to take down a case of beer and a little whiskey, because they like to drink. And you go down there and knock on the door." Well, this one guy is with you, he knows all about it, but the other guy don't know a darn thing. And pretty soon these girls would say, "Go away! Go away!" And this one guy knows all of what's going to happen, but he keeps on knocking anyway. This other guy's on pins and needles right then and there. But pretty soon the door would open, and this guy would come out with a gun and shoot. And this guy that knows all about it, he'd fall over as if he got shot, and that would really put that other guy in high gear leaving that place. [laughter] He'd come uptown. [laughter] Meanwhile, we'd be parked in different places. We'd see him when he got uptown, heaven knows what time.

But it was a setup?

S: Oh, yes, setup all the time. We done that a lot of times.

That was kind of the welcome to the new guy.

S: Yes, the newcomers—especially if you wanted to go down and see some pretty women. It didn't work out that way.

[laughter] Did you know Fred Vollmar Jr.?

S: Fred Vollmar? Oh, yes. I knew Fred Vollmar.

Tell me about Fred. What was he like?

S: Well, he was a pretty good guy. I don't have nothing . . . I worked for him here, and I also worked for him up at Gabbs. I hauled ore for him out of those mines and done quite a lot of work for him.

Did you go to his house?

S: Oh, yes. I've been to his house. He lived down there in Silver Peak, yes. Pretty nice. I don't know if Hefty Sanderson bought that place or who got it. I don't know.

OK. And what about E.L. Cord. Did you know him?

S: Yes, I knew him, but he stayed pretty well in Fish Lake Valley.

He didn't stay in [Silver Peak] . . .

S: No, he didn't stay. He come over.

He had two boys, and I remember the two boys when, about the time the war broke out, he told his boys to get tires for his cars. And then right away they rationed, and you couldn't get any tires. But Cord had bought up quite a few tires, and the boys went there and tried to get tires from his dad, and his dad wouldn't give them. He said, "I told you, you need to get them tires," he said, "before the war, and you didn't do it."

So the kid said, "Well, we'll do the best we can." So they went and bought him a new . . . well, pretty near a new car anyway. Well, they got the tires anyway, but had to buy a car. [laughter]

So E.L. Cord lived in Fish Lake Valley for a while?

S: Yes, I think he lived over there, yes. That what it seems like to me, where he come from, yes.

Do you know any stories about Fred Vollmar?

S: No, not really. Not that I know of. No.

OK. But he lived in town. He was in town all the time. Is that right?

S: Yes, yes, yes.

Did he come up to the mine?

S: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

You saw him underground, did you?

S: Well, I don't . . . recollect too much about him maybe being underground. Or Cord either. He seemed to stay away from underground, but I'd see him on the surface, you know, and talk to him about different things. And he was with the superintendent. And I forget what his name was, too.

What else about Silver Peak? What did you like about Silver Peak?

S: Well, I don't know. Silver Peak was a town that people was for one another, and they all got along pretty well. I remember one time we had went over to Goldfield, and we had a building going to come for our schoolhouse. It seemed like a high school. But Silver Peak was not far enough away from Goldfield to have the [school] building. So we got it all ready, and they wouldn't let us move it. So what we done, a bunch of us got together, and we moved it on Halloween night. And we moved that over across the

flat during the night. And then, when they found out it was done, they began to wonder, "Now where did that thing go to?" And they found out where it went. And how did it get there? Nobody knew a darn word how that building got there.

Were you in on that?

S: Yes. [laughter] Yes, we all got together, and we just tried to move it during the night, and we did. [laughter]

Where did you move it to?

S: We moved it from Goldfield, on the other side of Silver Peak a little ways, down by the pond. And so we got the building moved. And then I think later on they moved it back into Silver Peak.

Did your wife like Silver Peak?

S: Yes, she liked it pretty good.

Yes. What did she like about it?

S: Well, I guess the people were . . . she had some pretty good friends. I have seen letters waiting for me from Texas. Randolph and Howard East and Russell East. There was three brothers. And they was all pretty darn good people. Yes, Randolph's wife, she's still alive. In fact, Howard's wife is still alive. She lives down there out of Yerington . . . out of Fernley. Randolph's wife, she lives in Texas.

So you made some good friends while you were here.

S: Oh, yes. Well, their husbands worked for me. They was good workers.

Yes. Was there something important about Silver Peak that sticks in your mind?

S: Well, I don't know. I kind of liked it when I first went there and we decided to settle there. We had a pickup and a camp and stuff of that sort. And I didn't know how quick I'd get to work or nothing like that. I asked my wife, I said, "Where would you like to be?" and she said, "I'd like to be down there where that big tree is." And when we got down there, there were three or four guys there.

And I said, "You guys got this occupied?"

And they said, "Yes."

And I said, "Well, we'd like to have it. What would it take?" [laughter]

"You give us a quart of whiskey, we'll move out." So I went and got them the quart of whiskey, and they moved out. We pitched our tent, and then later on we built a house there. And we moved that house to Hawthorne when I went over there.

Was that usual to move houses when the mining changed?

S: Oh, yes. I moved a lot of houses.

You helped move some out of Silver Peak?

S: Oh, yes. I even helped them move them out of Round Mountain and several other places.

Why did you move houses?

S: Well, they paid pretty good money.

OK. Merle, this area is all changed since you were here before, right?

S: Yes, right.

Tell me about what's going on here.

S: Well, it's changed, so I don't really know exactly where I was at.

Was this all underground before?

S: Yes, yes. We had none of this. Over here in the hill, we had one place we just hit sixteen-ounce gold on . . . sixteen ounces of silver. And when I left there, I blasted that in. I didn't . . . they asked me to, so I did. And that ore's still here as far as I know. And I'd like to know. If they ever get into it, I'd like to come over and just see, because we just found that when I was there. And the vein's about four-feet wide. I can remember that, and I'd like to have it, but I could never get it.

Did you ever do any open-pit mining?

S: No. No, not here. No.

But you've done some?

S: Oh, yes. I've got an open-pit mine now. Several of them.

What do you like best?

S: Well, if you're just going to go ahead and mine the material that's like they're getting to come in and get here, this is usually the best way to go. But I liked underground mining because in here your values is much, much better than what you'd get on your surface.

Merle, can you tell me about the businesses that were in Silver Peak?

S: Well, we had quite a lot of business there in Silver Peak. I think we only had the one quality store. That was Hank Gilbert's. And we had a couple of restaurants, if I remember right, but we had a lot of bars. We wasn't short of bars.

How many?

S: I don't remember how many, but there's . . . oh, see, there must have been at least five or six. And then they had the one post office. It's still up there. I think it was up there on the main street where you're coming in. And I remember one time this lady from Texas, her husband working for me, and that was Randolph East. And her boy was sitting in the car, and she got out to go in to get the mail, and one of the boys sat in there, and the boy dropped the car in gear and took the brake over something. It went on down a couple of fences and tore the car up. She got over there and said, "What did you do that for?"

He said, "Because this car is just too old. I'd like to get a new one. Better one." [laughter]

Was there a grocery store?

S: Yes, yes. There was a couple of them.

Would you describe them?

S: I don't remember who had them. No. They was right close there to Hank Gilbert's clothing store. I believe, if I remember right, I think Hank Gilbert took the one over there next to him before he left there.

And we also had a car salesman there too. I think he sold Plymouth and Dodge cars. In fact, I bought my first new car in Silver Peak from that salesman. That was in 1939, when the first 1939s come out, I bought it. I give \$950 for it. 1939. And now that thing will cost you about fifteen . . . eighteen thousand. Yes. And that was a real good little car. It would go seventy miles an hour in second gear. Yes, I always enjoyed Silver Peak while I was here.

Was it different from any of the other towns that you went to?

S: Oh, yes. I liked Silver Peak. The people that was here at that time were much more friendly than they are in most of the places. Those people are raised to help you. I remember one time, too . . . Well, this was after we had the house built, and we saw this tent on fire just a little ways from where we was. And we run up there, and it was in the wintertime. And this little girl was about, oh, maybe five months old or four months. She even had ice in her hair. And that tent was ruined. So what we done, we brought them down to our place, my wife and I, and we made beds all over the floors. So then I put her husband to work. Well, I know that his wife had been married before. She had two boys from the first marriage. In fact, he lives in Mina now. His name is Merrill Thompson. And . . . darn, I can't think of this other one's name.

But you liked the people in Silver Peak, because they would always help out?

S: Oh, yes. They was always willing to help you. And we was always together. One [would] suggest something and then talk it over with the others, and pretty soon we'd all be . . . like moving that building. Like I say, that was no problem. And I don't know. Time went by pretty fast, and we all enjoyed one another.

And that's different than some of the other places you've been?

S: Yes. Some of the other people . . . they don't take off at first, and then you're no good. Whatever you're doing is no good. But this here was real good. They're real nice. I'm glad that I was over here and had done what I've done. I'm tickled to death to say that.

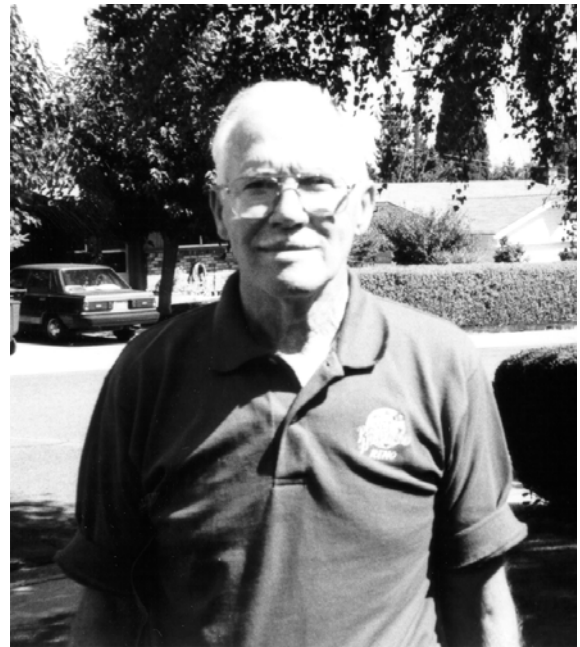
LEON HILL

ALTHOUGH LEON HILL was born in California, he has lived his life in Nevada. His father was superintendent of the Black Mammoth Mill, and his family played an instrumental role in the Silver Peak community as it became a family town. His memories of childhood and young adulthood in Silver Peak were distinct and detailed. In his oral history interviews, he described a family town where children had fun, teens could rebel (mildly by today's standards), and young adults were welcomed home again. Hard work, practical jokes, good clean fun, and a helping hand—those were the staples of Silver Peak from the 1930s to the 1950s.



VICTORIA FORD: Today is August 28, 1996. I am with Leon Hill in his home in Reno. Today we're going to be talking about his memories of Silver Peak, Nevada. Let's start, Leon, with your birth date and where you were born.

LEON HILL: My birth date is November 7, and I was born in 1917. I was born in Los Angeles, California. But my family at that



time were actually living at Tule Canyon, and we were out there shortly after that. So I spent just about all of my life in Nevada with the exception of the time I was in the service for a short while and was off working sometimes, too, during the war years.

But you're a true Nevadan even though you were born elsewhere.

Yes.

Your family was in Tule Canyon. Is that in Nevada, or is that still California?

No, that's Nevada. That's south of Goldfield about, I don't know, twenty miles, twenty-five miles. That's where Goldfield gets their water [*Chronicler adds that that information is wrong. Goldfield gets their water from Lida nearby.*]

Your parents were living there [Tule Canyon] around the time that you were born and shortly after, is that right?

They were living there, I know, shortly after. I always thought that they were living there before. They owned some property down there anyway. And they had a fellow that they used to know that used to be a partner there. And they went down there, I thought on business, and then I was born there, and then we returned. But my cousin, Frances Chiatovich, tells me that wasn't so. She said I was born in California before we moved to Tule Canyon—that they waited, I guess, until I was born before they went up there.

And then moved to their property in Tule Canyon. And what took them there?

Mining. Yes. My Uncle Frank, he was always interested in mining, and so they moved there. My father's name was Fayette Hill, and my uncle's name was Frank.

OK. And were they the first generation of your family to be involved in mining in Nevada, your father and your uncle?

I'm not sure. Possibly my grandfather could have been.

What do you remember of your grandfather or know of him?

Well, I know that they were there when Goldfield was discovered, because they did some building there. My uncle had some old trucks (they weren't old then, I guess), but he had some trucks that they hauled materials in and built houses and things of that sort. But my grandfather, Oscar Hill I remember my brother, he just used to call him Willie Oscar. [laughter] So his first name must have been William, but that doesn't sound right. Anyway, I don't know. I don't remember what his first name was because we always called him Grandpa.

Grandpa, right. And that's what you would remember him as.

And I remember him over in Silver Peak when he had a house there that was built half underground, kind of like a sod house, half underground and covered with dirt like these igloos out at the depot. And then he also had an old Model T Ford, and so he had a garage up on top of the ground adjoining it with the stairway going right down into that. And he'd sit out there in the afternoons. But he also had a mine up in back of his house. And I remember asking him one time, he was talking about his mine He used to go up there and work it. He never did get anything out of it, I don't think, or he might have in the early days. But he'd go out there and dig, make a few feet, then go home and rest. I said, "Is there any gold in it?"

And he said, "Sure."

And I said, "Well, then why don't you strip it?"

And he said, "Because there's too much rock." [laughter]

That's kind of the way it is with a lot of mines.

Yes! [laughter]

So your grandfather lived in Silver Peak when you remembered him. And did he

build that house himself, that kind of sod house out of the rock and so on?

He did. And we were over at Silver Peak when I was about four.

To live or to visit?

No, to live. We lived there for a while. I had two brothers—there were three boys altogether. They were both older than me. And then Gerry, my sister, she was younger. And she was over two years younger, pretty near three. And I can vaguely remember this, these things really stand out in my memory. She was sitting out there in front of our house. It was a frame house that was built in front of that . . . where you saw that picture of the old store. And part of that was a chicken house, and part of it was where some people slept, like my uncle, something like that. And we lived in this frame house. But anyway, we were out in front, my sister and I. And a bull snake came along, and it climbed up, and she put up her hands like that, and the bull snake went right between her hands and over her shoulder. So I went in, and I thought that was neat, I guess, and I told Mom about it. And so she came out to see it. And, oh boy, did she scream! [laughter] So Grandpa came, and he got a shovel. Mom wanted him to kill it. He said, “OK. OK. I’ll kill it.” So he took it across the road, and there was a hole over there. I don’t know, somebody dug a ditch or something. And he put the snake down there, but he didn’t kill it. “Ah,” he said, “they kill rats and stuff like that.”

But your mother was terrified of snakes, it sounds like.

Oh, she was, because over in Tule Canyon, it was just full of snakes. I mean, they lived in a rock house over there, and sometimes she’d open the cupboard, there’d be a snake looking at her. She’d go out and

sit under a tree, and there’d be a snake up in the tree. I didn’t know snakes climbed trees, but they do. [laughter]

Really? So you have a real clear memory of that snake at your house when you moved to Silver Peak.

That’s . . . yes . . . I don’t remember very much. I remember stepping on a nail once and putting peroxide on it.

To disinfect it?

Yes. And seeing all of those bubbles, I thought that was neat. And I remember my Grandpa telling me that was poison coming out.

The house that you lived in, the frame house [in Silver Peak], that was near where your grandfather lived? Was it within walking distance? Could you walk back and forth to it as a kid?

No, not to where my Grandpa lived. This was up in the south end of town, and he lived, oh, probably in the center of town. Of course, it wasn’t a great big town. But he lived back up next to the hills. And he was up there all alone. He was the only one. Well, the cemetery was up not too far from there.

So he was up by where the cemetery still is now, correct?

Yes.

And did your father build this frame house, or was it already there? Do you recall?

I don’t know.

How long did you live in that house?

I have no idea. My next memories are from Goldfield. And I remember the 1923

fire. I was six years old then, but I can remember that fire. And I remember my first day of school.

Tell me about the fire first. What do you remember of the fire in Goldfield?

I remember my mother getting me up in the middle of the night, taking us out there. [laughter] And we stood across the street from the school, and we watched the fire from there, and it was a terrible fire. And, of course, you know, being kids, we thought it was great—all of that excitement, because there usually wasn't a lot of excitement around. But back in those days they didn't have much of a fire department. [laughter] And so my dad was at the fire all night long and all through the next day, too.

Did they have a fire truck? How did they fight the fire? Was it all fought by hand?

Yes. It was all fought by hand, yes. And they didn't really have a lot of water. All they had was that they got from Lida, and it came in about a, I don't know, a two-inch pipe at most. So that's all. They had a tank up on the hill. Well, there was a Rabbit Springs up there out of Goldfield, but it was quite a ways away. And all they could do would be go up and dip a little bit out, which wouldn't do a lot of good in that fire.

Yes. So quite a bit of Goldfield burned, do you recall?

A lot of it.

The business district or homes?

Oh, yes. Both. Mostly the business district. The story goes that it was Jack Keaton's still. This was during prohibition, and there was a still there, and the still blew up and right next door was Parker's Garage. In those days the gasoline was in drums.

And that caught on fire, and that started blowing up. And then, that really spread the fire. And the wind was blowing, unfortunately, in a northerly direction which carried it up through town. But there was a lot of stone and brick buildings there, and a lot of those burned.

Didn't affect your house? Your house did not catch on fire.

No.

Did it affect your father's work at all at that point? Was he working in Goldfield, or were you just living there with your mom?

At that time he was a mechanic for Parker at Parker's Garage. And he also, during that period, whenever there was trouble with one of the pumps or something at the mines, he'd work there. So he did a little of everything.

Because he was a talented mechanic? What were his skills?

Oh, yes, he was. And a machinist. You know, he could make anything. I know when he was fourteen years old and his brother was twelve, they had a bicycle shop up in Spokane, Washington. And then they lived in Truckee for a long time.

Truckee, California?

But, oh, as a matter of fact, later, during when he was superintendent of the mill there at Silver Peak at the Black Mammoth cyanide plant, the ore comes down . . . I don't know if you're familiar with that or not. But in a cyanide plant, they used the Merrill-Crowe precipitation process. And when the ore comes down, it is dumped into a chute up on top or a bin, and then it goes down through the chute, and it goes through jaw crushers. These are large crushers that

crush the big rocks. And from there it goes on a conveyor, and then sometimes it will go through another crusher, one that'll crush it a little bit smaller—a cone crusher they call it. And then from there it goes out into a ball mill. And then it's mixed up there with cyanide solution, and it's ground up in the balls. And then as it rises . . . see, as the thing gets full, the mud goes out over the top, down through a screen, and then from there it's pumped up to a classifier. A classifier is a thing that's built oblong. It's probably, oh, maybe twenty feet long or something like that.

Like a tray or is it enclosed?

Like a tray. It's like a tray.

An open tray.

And it slopes up a little like that, and it's got two large rakes in it that go like this to rake the mud up.

So they go back and forth across it.

Yes, across like that. And so the purpose of this is, because the mud that's been ground fine enough and it's in solution, it goes over the top, and it'll float on through and go into a thickener and on into the system. The heavier stuff is raked up and goes back through the ball mill again. And that way they're sure that it's going to get ground enough to where they'll get their gold recovery.

And this is how the Black Mammoth Mill operated?

That's the Black Mammoth cyanide plant. The flotation didn't do this.

There were two plants operating within the Black Mammoth [company]?

Yes, but after the cyanide plant started, the flotation plant was shut down.

I see, OK. So they actually changed over in the Black Mammoth Mill from one process to the other?

That's right.

Did that happen while your father was there?

Yes. And, well, what I wanted to tell you about was something about my dad's ingenuity. [laughter] Now, a cyanide plant never shuts down because they got . . . well, it depends on the size of the plant, but maybe up to a million or so gallons of solution and mud in there. And if that ever settles, somebody has to go down there and shovel it out.

So it operates twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

That's right. It goes all of the time. But once in a while, the plant had to be shut down to put new liners in the ball mill or something of the sort. And sometimes the power would go off, and so it would shut off by itself. When that happened, that mud settled in that classifier. So if you tried to start it up, what happened was, it'd just bend the rods.

The rakes could not start.

They couldn't move through all of that mud. So it would bend the rods. Anyway, it wouldn't do it, because the motor wouldn't pull it. You'd have to have too big of a motor. So you'd have to go in and shovel all of that mud out of there, and that was a heck of a job, and besides that, it was a great delay in things. And so what my dad did was, he took off the rods and exchanged them for real heavy springs. So what happened was then



“That’s the Black Mammoth cyanide plant . . . [A]fter the cyanide plant started, the flotation plant was shut down.” L to r: The Black Mammoth and Vollmar Mills, Silver Peak, Nevada. (Photograph courtesy of Gerry Cooper.)

when the power would go off like that, they’d turn everything back on again, and then a spring would stretch, but it would go a little ways until pretty soon they’d get the rake going, and there was no damage done, and they saved all that problem they had before.

So it allowed the rakes to give without breaking the metal. And so he invented the solution to that problem of when the plant went down or when it had to stop.

That’s right. Well, you know, the fact that they were out in Silver Peak, which was away from every place, and even Reno didn’t have anything in those days. Heck, there was probably only ten thousand people here anyway. And so they *had* to improvise. He made so many things there that you couldn’t believe it.

That’s just one example of the kind of solutions that he came up with.

That’s the sort of thing they had to do. I know my sister mentioned that, and that’s what she was talking about . . . And later it was patented by someone else, but he told them he didn’t want to patent this. He said, “I don’t want to fool around with that sort of thing.” [laughter] So all he wanted to do was make it work.

Do you remember any other ideas like that or things that he created because of job necessity that were later patented by other people?

No. There were so many though that . . . so many things. He wasn’t really concerned about trying to get parts, you know. It took so long to get anything, and half of it had to

be custom-made anyhow. And so he just did it.

He just custom-made it. What was his actual job title at the Black Mammoth Mill?

He was superintendent.

And yet, he didn't just supervise, which is sort of how we think of superintendents today.

No.

He was in there actually solving problems and making parts and that type of thing.

Yes. Well, as long as we're talking about this, I'm going to go ahead and tell you how the rest of that system works—the Merrill-Crowe precipitation system. That's the cyanide plant. After that goes through that, the ore gets drilled fine enough, it goes into what they call thickeners. These are great big tanks that are full of cyanide solution. In there they have these rakes that go round and round all of the time. They keep stirring up this mud. And the lighter stuff goes up to the top, and it'll go down through these . . . well, they're trays that'll feed it into another thickener and so on. After it goes through two or three thickeners, then it'll go to an agitator. And this goes in, and it stirs it all up good with the cyanide solution, to get it all mixed up good. And then from there it will go through one more thickener, and then it goes into the precipitation tank. And in the precipitation tank they have . . . well, it's got a lot of leaves. It's like a pipe right down the middle with a bunch of leaves that were about, oh, probably two and a half or three feet by five feet high.

And these are like metal?

No, it's all made of pipe with holes in it, in the center, but they're covered with

canvas. On a schedule, you had to put so much zinc powder; you dump that in there. The mill operator did. And then this would mix up with that in the precipitator, and the gold would adhere to the zinc. And then they had a vacuum pump. It would pump the solution through these leaves and back into the system again. And that would cause the zinc to stick to the leaves. When they get ready to clean up and have a melt, then they'd wash that off of there.

Off of the canvas?

It goes down into the smelting room and [is] dried. They had driers down there. To finish this process, after that finished mud goes over to a great big drum, and this was a filtering drum where the tailings went. And it turned. And the solution was pumped out through that, too. See, that was all through pipes. And the cyanide solution was pumped out and goes back into the system.

And was recycled?

And [was] recycled. And then the mud that was on the outside is washed off with fresh water, and it goes out into the tailings pond. And so that finishes the processing, except for then is the smelting. After that gets dry, then one night about twelve-thirty or one o'clock, my dad shows up at the mill, and whoever's on duty, he has one of them come down and help him, and they go down there and shovel all of that up, put them into great big crucibles, melt it up in a tremendous heat. Well, you have to put on rubber gloves and rubber boots and everything.

And some kind of coat. All protective gear?

It's all protective rubber, yes. Well, of course, he did the actual pouring. And once it was melted, he poured it off, and the slag came off first. And then he poured the gold.

And when we got all through, we had to take all those clothes off, and we'd leave them there. The last time that they used them, they burned them, because they might be impregnated with gold. And so then he'd make bars that'd be about, oh, so big.

What would you say those dimensions were?

Oh, I would say probably eight or ten inches [long] by about, probably, three or four inches wide. And as I remember, maybe a couple of inches high. And they were pretty heavy.

Would there be more than one poured in a night?

Sometimes, but not generally. They didn't like to let it go too long. I remember the one time they had a bar that went about teacup size, and they took that along. And anyway, when they were going into Tonopah with it, some way or other, it shook way under the seat, and boy, he like about had a fit until they found that. [laughter]

What happened then once the bar was poured? What would your father do with it?

Then he'd dump it out, and it'd cool pretty fast. And he'd put it in a sack and wrap it in a sack and then take it down . . . Well, he put it in his car. And then they'd go into Tonopah, and he'd take it to Wells Fargo.

Did he go by himself to Tonopah?

Oh, no.

How did he do that?

That was because the insurance company required that he have an armed

guard. So someone went with him. Generally, it was my mother, if she was there. And she was usually there because by the time that mill was built . . . No, all of the kids weren't out of school either. Gerry was still going to school over in Goldfield.

So your mother would have been over in Goldfield with Gerry part of the time?

Some of the time, probably. So I imagine that someone else would go. But they had to have someone go.

Were you ever involved on those trips to Tonopah as a kid?

Yes, once in a while.

How did you learn this process? Did your father take you into the mill, or did you work there later when you got older?

I was raised around the darn mills. That's how I came to work there. I didn't want to work for my dad. Well, I did work for him. I dug that ditch that run the pipeline up to that tank that I showed you in that picture.

OK. And that was the Vollmar Mill, or was that the Black Mammoth?

The Vollmar Mill. They were both Black Mammoth as a matter of fact. [laughter]

Owned by Black Mammoth Company?

Yes.

But they went by different names? Is that correct? They were sort of located side by side right in Silver Peak.

I don't know. I would just call them a flotation plant and a cyanide plant. To tell you the truth, I don't know how in the heck

they got the water up there before, because I sure as heck didn't have a ditch to dig in when I dug that one out there, I'll tell you that.

You did that when you were what, in high school or right out of high school?

No, it was right out of high school. Well, I wasn't quite eighteen. I got out of high school when I was seventeen.

So it would have been 1934 or 1935.

1935. I graduated in 1935, and that's when I dug that ditch.

OK. Tell me the story about how that happened. Who were you working for then?

I was working for my dad, but it was Fred Vollmar's fault. [laughter]

It was his fault that you had to dig that ditch! [laughter]

Well, he said, "I've got a job for you." I didn't want a job. I was out punching cows. We were chasing wild horses, having a heck of a time.

Having a good time.

Yes. I didn't want to do that. And so anyway, "So I have a job for you."

I thought, "Well, I better do it."

So he said, "Go up and see your dad." So I went up and saw my dad, but I didn't think I would be working for him. Then he put me to digging that cottonpicking ditch.

Your dad did?

Yes.

But it was Fred's idea that you had to dig that ditch? [laughter]

I guess so. He knew that it had to be dug! [laughter] I think that what he wanted to do was give me a job.

Yes, and you dug it by hand? I mean, you didn't have any power tools?

Every bit by hand.

About how long was it?

Well, I'll tell you How about I tell you what I *think* it was. It's probably not near as long as I think. Especially up that hill. That was quite a ways at that, by golly. The well was right down below where my dad lived. And, in fact, that pump would go all night long, and I bet that made everyone real happy, but it didn't bother me. I'd go right to sleep. But anyway, that would have been I'd say at least two hundred and fifty yards—at *least* that much. And at one part it went right up next to where the old flotation plant was, up alongside, next to that. That son of a gun was rock.

Solid.

Well, mostly. It seemed solid to me.

It felt like solid rock with a pick.

It wasn't that bad, I don't think. But I don't know how they got the water up there originally for the flotation plant, but they had water. The flotation plant was still there, and it was still running at the time I dug that ditch. I remember my dad coming out, and he'd say, "Oh, you haven't gotten anywhere!"

And I said, "Yes, you know this is easy for you. You're the boss. You sit in there in the shade and watch me out here digging this ditch." [laughter]

He said, "Well, someday you're going to find out what an easy job you really had." And you know, it's true. I did find that out.

Why was that true? Because that sounds like hard work.

Well, yes. But one thing about it, at quitting time I was all through. I didn't have another worry. I didn't worry about that ditch. The only thing that I worried about was having to go back tomorrow.

Which meant what? That your father was trying to talk to you about the responsibility of his job?

That's right. Later on, when I had jobs that involved, you know, personnel matters, and you'd ask someone to do something, and it isn't in the position description, or they didn't think they were getting paid enough, or they couldn't do it because they couldn't lift or something, you found out what a problem really was. [laughter] And you were responsible for having a job get done.

Yes. To try to convince somebody to do it for you.

Yes. And so your responsibility didn't end at four o'clock when you went home. Of course, it happened out at Silver Peak [at] three o'clock.

So quitting time was three o'clock. Were there shifts, and what hours did your father usually spend at the mill?

My father? Oh, my God, he'd go up there usually around seven or eight o'clock in the morning, and he'd be there most of the day. He'd leave from time to time when he had to go do something—make phone calls, because we didn't have telephones everywhere in those days.

Where did he make phone calls?

He had to go down to the powerhouse. That was the only telephone in town.

OK. But otherwise he was at the mill.

Either that, or if they had to make something he'd be out to the dumps maybe looking for an old piece of metal or something that he could make it out of. And then he might be back there at eight o'clock at night or nine o'clock or any other time. He was in and out all of the time.

Since it ran twenty-four hours a day, he was responsible for it all the time. But normally there was a shift that ended at three o'clock, is that right? And then another shift started.

At eleven. There was three, eleven, and seven.

Do you remember your father being home much in the evening, or did you have time to do things as a family with your father included?

Oh, yes.

Was he involved with the family?

Yes, a lot. As a matter of fact, he was the most good-natured man, and everyone . . . Yet he was strict. [laughter] But you could hear him laugh all over town, and everybody enjoyed that, you know. Like he was always turning the hose on somebody or some darn thing.

He liked to joke around.

Not at work. Not at work. But this was always at home with the family. And I don't know if Gerry told you or not, but sometimes she didn't want to get up when he called her. And in the summertime she'd sleep out in a screened porch, because it was

cooler. So he'd get up, and he'd just dump a bucket of water out the window on her head! [laughter]

To get her up?

Yes.

Yes. So he had a real playful side.

Yes, he did. And he was always that way.

What kinds of things did your family do together? For example, did you always have an evening meal together?

Oh, yes.

Dinnertime, a time when everybody got together?

Well, we did up until the time that we got big enough to leave home. Then, even when I was at Silver Peak, I didn't live at home anymore. After high school I didn't live at home.

Where did you live then?

Oh, I don't know. I slept in a tunnel there for quite a long time.

In a tunnel? Where at?

Right up there, not very far from my folks' house.

Right in town, there were some tunnels around?

Well, yes. Do you know where that store was, you saw the picture of?

Yes.

The first store. Well, it was in that hill that's right behind that. There's a hill right

behind there, and there was a tunnel back in there about, oh, probably a hundred feet. Then about fifty feet back, there was a branch that went off, crossed up there somewhere. And it was always the same temperature in there, summer or winter.

About what? Was it like sixty, seventy degrees, eighty?

I really don't know because . . .

It was comfortable, though.

Yes. You know, when you're young, you're always warm. And so it was a good place to sleep, and it was quiet, and you weren't bothered by the weather. If it was cold or warm outside, you never knew it in there. It was always about the same. And when I worked shifts, it was a good place to sleep.

Did you have anything else in there? Did you have a bed in there? Did you have furniture in there?

Just the bed. And then I ate at the boardinghouse.

Who ran the boardinghouse?

Ma Brown. Ma Brown was a cook over at Oasis Ranch in Smith Valley. And by the way, that's in California, but it's right close there. And she had a daughter there. I remember I went over and got her and brought her over to Silver Peak a couple of times. And so she and a lady named Mrs. Pergrossi, they started a kind of a boardinghouse there in a little old house. Well, the Pergrossis lived there. And they started this boardinghouse there and a restaurant type thing. And then later they separated, and Ma Brown moved her cafe on her own into Perry White's bar, and he built

a place on the side there so she had a lunch counter.

So Perry White's bar and her restaurant were together then?

It was all in the same building. You could either pay her by the meal or pay her by the month. And I think it was only about thirty dollars a month to eat there.

Thirty dollars a month to eat there. And was that all of your meals?

That was a boardinghouse. She didn't have a rooming house. I don't think she ever did, to my knowledge. And then later, she took this old building that was right near there, where Jimmy Gavin's cafe was and so on afterward. And she took that, and the building had no roof on it. And she put a roof on it and fixed it up, and then she made a boardinghouse and a cafe out of that.

And so you ate your meals at the cafe. All right. How is it that you were away from home after high school? Was that kind of a family expectation, or you wanted to be out on your own?

No, I didn't want to be at home.

You didn't want to be at home anymore? Why was that?

I don't know. It wasn't that I didn't go there. I went up a lot. But I wanted to feel independent, I suppose. Besides that I didn't want a lot of advice. You know, at about that age, I was one of the smartest people in the world. [laughter]

Yes! [laughter] And your father wasn't as smart, right at that age?

Oh, boy! Heck no! [laughter]

So it was a matter of you wanting to be independent; that's why you struck out on your own.

That's . . . yes. It wasn't that I . . . Oh, Lord, we were always on good terms.

OK. And so after high school you dug that ditch. What else? Is that also when you worked shifts in the mine or in the mill? Which did you work in?

Well, after that I went to work in the mill.

OK. For your dad at the Black Mammoth Mill?

By that time I think the other mill was probably about built. Oh, I remember he fired me once.

Your dad fired you? For what?

Yes. Well, it was on New Year's, and they were going to line the ball mill. When you line the ball mill, they shut the thing down. They had to shut the mill down while they did it. And so they wanted to get it done as soon as possible and get back in there. Well, the people in the mill had an opportunity to work if they wanted to, but they didn't have to. But if you said you wanted to work, you should work.

You should show up.

That's right. And so I thought, oh, I didn't want to do anything on New Year's, so I wanted to work, because I wanted the extra money. I just threw it away, so I don't know why I wanted it, but anyway, I said I'd work, and then I didn't show up. And so my mother sent Gerry down . . . at that time I was sleeping downtown. There was an old ruins of a building there, and we slept in that. And she came down and told me, she said, "You better get to work."

And I said, "OK." I think I went to bed at about six o'clock and this was about seven when I should have been at work. And so I thought about it a little bit, and I was going to get up, and the next thing I knew I was asleep. And pretty soon she came down again, and she said, "Dad says for you to get up to work right now." And by that time I felt awful, and besides that I'd had too much to drink. And I said, "I don't work for anyone on New Year's Day."

I don't think it was fifteen minutes and here he came with my check. [laughter] That's the only time I was ever fired. That was sure a good lesson, boy. [laughter]

He agreed that you didn't work for anybody on New Year's Day?

Oh, was I ever glad that I got fired.

Were you? Why?

Oh, I was tickled to death. Well, my uncle had been married to this lady for a while, and . . .

Was this Frank?

Frank.

Yes. He'd been married to who?

He was married to Betty. I don't know what her last name was. Before that he was married to Lillian. That was Frances' and Kenneth's mother. Well, I don't know about that story. [laughter]

OK. Does that seem like a family story?

Well, no. Anyway, she wanted this horse. There were quite a few horses around there. She wanted this horse that was a thoroughbred. But she was afraid to ride it because it did like to buck and stuff. One thing about that horse was, we used to go out

and chase mustangs with him, and we'd bring them in, and we'd corral them (if we could get them in there), and then we'd ride them and turn them loose. Anyway, I was on a marsh, and we were driving these horses in. And that horse of hers, boy, he could run like a son of a gun. She let me use him. And so then she was out there watching, of course. And we're going along, and the horse jumped in a soft spot in the marsh and just, plooeey! Like that, just sunk. We had a heck of a time getting him out, and then he was all covered with mud. And she wouldn't let me ride him anymore! [laughter]

Later they'd separated, and this fellow by the name of Flint, he was in partner with the Coughlins there in Silver Peak; they had some cattle running out there in the Palmetto Range. So he bought this horse, but he was afraid to ride it, too. He wanted me to go with him to ride it, so I went out there and punched cows for a while.

And you liked that better than working in the mill?

Well, yes. Sure. I was just out of school, and I didn't want to work for my dad. And then later I worked for him again. That was after I was married, but I went up there then because someone else didn't show up, and because I was familiar it. He needed the help, so I went up to help. And then we got along fine after that. But I was married by then.

So you were starting to settle down a little bit. [laughter]

Getting a little brains. I figured I had to work. I couldn't go fiddling around chasing cows! [laughter]

I want to go back and ask . . . When you were sleeping in the tunnel, were there other people who did that, too?

Yes.

So that was not unusual. But there wasn't furniture in there so much as you just made your beds in there and then ate at the boardinghouse, is that right?

Yes. But there were people up at the mine, up around the Mary Hill. See, there was a lot of people living around the hill. Some of them would contract for the Black Mammoth, and some of them owned their own little properties here and there. A lot of them would lease, so they might live in a cave, which is nothing more than a tunnel. [laughter] And they actually had furniture in it. Some of them put in framework and made a door and stuff like that.

So it was not unusual to have people living in the tunnels. There were a number of people who did that.

Oh, yes. No, no. It was quite common, and especially for people who worked shift work, although they didn't work shift work there. But there was an interesting thing, too, about the mines. You know, they had some real serious earthquakes there at about . . . I don't know, 1930s. Well, you may have heard of them. And over around Mina and through there, that's where I think they centered mostly. And across there you could follow where the earth had opened up for, oh, several miles . . . toward Gabbs, toward Tonopah.

You could see the fault line?

Oh, yes. Yes. That was all opened up. And it also had a few places that opened up, up on the Mary Hill. An interesting thing about this is that when that opened up, my uncle, he had studied the maps and so on in this mine. And he figured that where the Silver Peak Pittsburg caved in, where that pillar was, that should be in about the area

where this crack was. So he tied a rope to something and started letting himself down this hole. And where it was too narrow, he had a pick with him, and he just picked away so he could get through. He climbed on down to the bottom, and he found ore down there, and he found some on the hanging wall on the way down. So he started to mine that, and he hired a couple of people. They made an opening there so they could get down in there. And he took a considerable amount of ore out of there. But he made a lot of money out of that hole.

Because of that earthquake opening it back up. Tell me the story about the pillars, because when you described this, there is some background about where this location is and what was going on there.

Well, it was up at the Silver Peak Pittsburg. Oh, first, you know, that property belonged to several people. But when the Silver Peak Pittsburg owned it . . .

And this is up at the Mary Mine, is it?

It's at the Mary Mine. Now, most of this gold ore came from the Mary. Oh, some came from the Orovada, and some came from the Valcalda and other properties up there. But the bulk of it came out of the Mary. And we always thought of the Mary as the whole hill, although I think they called it Mineral Ridge or some darn thing. But the native name was Mary Hill. [laughter]

But anyway, what they did was, they went in, and they hit this great big stope of ore. It was tremendous. Well, they wanted to get all of the values out they could, so they mined that all the way up to the hanging and all the way down to the foot. They were getting about all of the ore that they could get, of the high-grade ore, because you had to have high grade in those days at twenty dollars a ton. Instead of putting in timber like they so often do in a lot of mines, they

were leaving these large pillars. They had a pillar, just a bunch of those . . . they just dug around.

Dug around it, so it acted like a pillar had been put in [to hold it up].

That's right. They got in there until pretty soon they exhausted this big ore body, so then they started to back out, and they started taking the pillars as they backed out.

Because there was ore in those, too.

That's right. They were just as valuable as some of the others—maybe more so, because it might have been right in the heart. Anyway, I think finally they got so many pillars out that the darn thing caved in. Well, they didn't think it was worth trying to dig everybody out to get those pillars, so they just walked away from them.

And left people in there? When it caved in, it killed people?

Yes.

When would that have happened? Was that when you were a young person?

Oh, no. It was way before my time.

But that was the story, that there were people in there. OK.

Yes, that's the story I heard. Anyway, later on, as I told you before, I was working for the Black Mammoth Mining Company. That was what their goal was, was to go back at this one particular tunnel we were in. And there was just a few of us working there, two or three of us working there. And we wanted to try to hit some of those pillars and take them out. We got up in there, and we thought we were getting pretty close to it,

and we started to raise. And when we raised, we hit what they call gob, which would be . . . the material was all loose in there, because it had caved in, probably. This started coming down there, so we quit raising there, and we went ahead and discontinued with our raise for a cross-cut. They said, "Well, dig some of that dirt out. That might be just a little bit of gob coming in there." And so we were digging this out, and we made a hole in there, up above our . . .

A good size hole?

Yes, pretty good size. About so big.

Big enough that a person could go through it?

This old fellow, this miner . . . I say old, he was probably, he might have been thirty-five or forty. [laughter]

But to a teenager he was old? [laughter]

Yes. He climbs up in there, and right after he gets up in there, we hear a whooshing, and here comes that hole filled up with dirt again. So he's stuck up there. Fortunately, there was a cavern right there, so he was safe. He wasn't caught in that slide. I called down. There was a guy working with me, and we started shoveling as fast as we could. And then I called down and caught the guy that was out there taking a workhorse, taking the dirt out and dumping it. And I hollered to him and told him to get some help up there; we had a cave-in. So some guys come up, and we dug this way. We just kept a digging and a digging. Pretty quick this guy, he had found some old powder boxes up there. So he took those and kind of shored it up around there so it would stop sliding. When he got a hole about so big, he says, "When you see my feet

come, jerk.” So he jumped, and we jerked.
[laughter]

Yes, and [you] got him out?

We got him out. And so the Black Mammoth decided not to fool around with that anymore. They said we could have the lease on it if we wanted to, so we took the lease on it. And a fellow by the name of Wild Bill Mayham, we took the lease on it. What we did was, we went ahead and shoveled out this place where all of the gob was. We thought we were at the edge of that pillar. And so we dug that out to where we could get it out of there . . . or no, we got up in there where that cavern was, and we widened that hole to the left, so we went away from where the gob was coming. We got up into this cavern and the hanging overhead, it went about forty dollars a ton in gold ore. It was in a limestone. It wasn't in quartz. And so we got a carload out of there. But I was convinced by that time that we hadn't hit that pillar. I thought it was exhausted, myself. So anyway, I said, “Well, I think I'm about to quit this thing.”

And so he said, “Well, I've got a friend that I think might want to buy it.” So I talked to him, and he said he'd buy it, so I sold it to him. I got a thousand dollars out of it besides what I got for the shoveling.

For the one ore carload that you got out.

And so they made wages out of it by picking. They found enough, well, you'd call it float, because you were in placer country. They found enough rocks where they kind of sorted this gob as they went through it, and it got enough ore in there to pay wages about, but they never did make any money in there.

Did you see any signs when you were in there that there had been a cave-in? Any traces of it?

Yes, we knew there had been a cave-in. Well, in other words, there had to be. How else would the powder boxes be up there.
[laughter]

Oh, right, yes. Back in that cavern.

And besides that, this cavern had been drilled out, sure. You could see where there was drill holes and stuff where they had been blasted.

I see. So you knew that they'd gotten in that far.

Oh, yes. See, we knew they'd been by there, anyway. Oh, yes. We knew somebody had been up there. Besides that, we found some bones, but we didn't ever bother with them.

So you wouldn't have known whether they were human?

We didn't know whether they were human or animal. And you know, it could be, too, that sometimes this gob could get into a mine, because the Mary Mine had all kinds of openings. And it could get in there pretty easy, because an animal or something would fall down a hole and die in there.

So there was no way of knowing, and you didn't send it to anybody to check it out or anything.

No. If I would have had sense enough, I would have, but I didn't. You know, I had heard the story about these . . . supposed to be Mexicans in here.

But you're talking about miners and where they lived. You know, the miners were a very independent lot. And they were pretty proud, too. And, you know, they played hard, and they worked hard. And I don't know why they worked so hard for

their money, because they just threw it away, but

How did they throw it away? Because you mentioned that you did the same thing?

Well, every Saturday night there was a dance. Even when they worked seven days a week, because, you know, back in those days, you did a lot. And not only that, you got paid for seven days a week. If you got five dollars a day, you got that every day. And they let you off on Christmas and the Fourth of July. You were docked. You didn't get paid.

Any day off you didn't get paid for.

No. But one time in about 1936 during the governor's election Fred Vollmar, he was kind of the white knight of that area, because he's the one that, you know, he promoted, developed, the whole business. He came up with the money by selling stock and by good salesmanship. And all of these people were working on account of him.

And this is during Depression years?

That's right. And he was really well liked. And so anyway, Mr. Fulton, a friend of his who was also Republican, was running for governor. And Fred Vollmar wanted him to be elected. So he goes around town, or he had somebody take a bunch of fliers around town with ballots on them showing everyone how to vote. He had every one of them marked off nice and plain. And he also went to all of the bars, had a bunch of them there. Every place had a lot of them. Besides that, he was out campaigning. And poor old Fulton didn't get hardly any votes. [laughter]

Didn't work?

No. You know, he more or less told them they had to do it. You don't tell a miner that. That's silly.

That was offensive to them, really, because they wanted to make up their own minds?

Yes, that's right.

That independent streak.

And they did all of those dances they'd have on Saturday nights. Sometimes they were at Shirley's Bar, and sometimes they were at Perry White's. But it didn't matter. All these guys showed up for this dance. And everybody drank a lot, and they'd dance and have a good time. You know, they'd buy drinks for the whole bar; they didn't even know who they were half of the time. And so . . . that sort of thing. That's why they're always broke.

That's where the money went. I mean, they'd earn it, and then they'd go

That's right. They'd just throw it away. Then things would be going along, and people would be happy, and somebody'd walk up to someone else, he'd have a pair of scissors. He'd reach up, and he'd say, "Do you want this tie?" And he'd cut it off and hand it to him. Pretty soon somebody'd come by, and he'd grab him by the collar and jerk his shirt off, and, oh, the next thing you know *everybody* was fighting. They didn't even know who they were fighting half of the time! They'd be at the bar, and a fight would be going on, so he'd turn around and slug the guy next to him and away they would go.

Were you involved in any of those?

Oh, a few times.

A few times. How did you fare? Did you do OK?

Well, I was still kind of a kid, you know. Although I shouldn't have been drinking either, but they didn't seem to worry about that. And besides that, my dad was superintendent of the Mammoth Mill, so they tore my shirt off, a few things a few times, but I didn't get in any . . . well, not very many anyway, serious brawls. But most everybody had a little bloody nose or a little ache here and there tomorrow or the next day. Yes, that was crazy.



You've mentioned in the cave-in, which happened before your time—that there were Mexicans in the mine; that was the story that you heard. Can you tell me what countries different people were from in town? You said there were some Serbians.

Oh, yes, quite a few.

Do you remember the family names?

Well, I don't know if Chiatoviches were Serbians or not. But there was . . . you know, the trouble with those names were, there were so many of them that were nicknames or first names or something like that.

Hard to know exactly?

But I remember going up to the mines with Jimmy Morris and some of the other people, and everybody made what they called . . . you always had to have a drink with them, and they called it grappa. Grappa, and it was real *strong*. Boy, it would curl your hair!

Do you know what was in it?

I don't know. I assumed it was some kind of a wine, made out of . . . [laughter] I don't know what it was made out of. Dynamite, I guess! [laughter]

[laughter] It was that strong!

Probably some kind of grape or something, but they must have really fermented it or done something to make it very strong. And it was white!

Clear, or white like milk?

Yes, it was a clear white. Well, of course, the whiskey was pretty near white, too, that was made around there.

Was grappa from some [particular] culture?

Yes.

Was that Serbian?

Yes, that's something that they were familiar with. One of . . . his name was Grappo; that was his last name, and there was an Apiscovich, and I think he was Serbian; he might have been something else, I don't know. And, oh, boy, there was a lot. Oh, some of them were later over in Tonopah. Senowski and Glusovich. And besides that, there were Maginesses and Hills . . . [laughter]

What is Hill? Do you know what the background is for Hill?

Well, my mother's name is Houser. And her father came from, she said, Pennsylvania-Dutch. But I think Hill is primarily English. We seem to be mixed up with Irish and English and Dutch, and I don't know what else.

OK. Were there other Irish in the town, too?

Oh yes, sure. There's always Irish.

Always Irish around the mines, you mean?

Yes. I don't know what the Shirleys were. I don't know what nationality they were.

Did the different nationalities get along? Were there any conflicts between, you know, the Serbs or the Irish or the others that you were aware of?

No, no more than usual, I don't think. They all seemed to be friends every day but Saturday night. [laughter]

Saturday night, when the fights started, and that didn't have anything to do with nationality, right?

No.

It had more to do with alcohol, it sounds like.

[laughter] Yes.

What about . . . were there any Mexicans working in the mines at that time?

Not to my knowledge, I can't think of a single one. But I understood that the Silver Peak Pittsburg brought those Mexicans in there.

Oh, I see. Specifically to work.

Yes. There were Indians around there.

Were there? Do you know what tribe?

Oh, yes, there was a Mexican there, but he didn't work in the mine. He worked for Coughlin and them. He punched cows for them. He said he was Spanish, but I think he was Mexican.

What about Asian? Any Asian people in town at that time?

No.

Or black? No?

Over in Goldfield, they wouldn't let Chinamen stay overnight.

Oh, they wouldn't?

No, that was the story anyway. Now, I never did see one overnight. I never seen one there anyway. They had a colored family, a fellow by the name of Johnson. But back in those days, you know, he was Nigger Johnson.

That's what people called him?

Yes. And, of course, he didn't mind it in those days. He was a very nice fellow. He did odd jobs around there—shine shoes and stuff like that. He had a family.

Yes, and that was in Goldfield?

Yes. I didn't have brains enough to be biased. I don't think anybody else around there did. We figured they were just people. And it's funny, I don't know why I hadn't heard (or if I did, it didn't register) anything about all these problems that they had in the South and all that. I'm sure I had to have heard it going to school.

Sure.

But it just didn't affect me. I didn't see it until I got in the service. And then later at Hawthorne when I worked there, because the navy had shipped a lot of them in there to get help during the war.

Yes. And that's when you started to be aware of the racial problems?

Well, yes. Because right after I got out they built a bowling alley in Hawthorne, and

a fellow by the name of Charlie Hendel—he was quite well-known in circles; as a matter of fact he’s mentioned in that book. And he got the concession to run the bowling alley, but he didn’t know anything about it nor did his wife. They were elderly people. And so Wilma and I, we went up there. They needed help.

And Wilma’s your wife?

Yes, she’s my wife. And the bowling alley was built; it was a twelve-lane bowling alley, but it had a centerline down it. It was two separate bowling lanes, actually, like two separate buildings except that the lobby went straight through. But otherwise they were partitioned off, and they were built primarily for blacks on one side and whites on the other. Though the blacks weren’t interested in bowling, so we used the . . .

But that really showed the segregation at that point.

That’s right. And shortly after that, I think, I don’t know when . . . Maybe it was when Eisenhower was elected. Anyway, sometime along there, they outlawed that in the military, and so . . .

Changed that.

Changed. But the black people there, they weren’t bowlers anyway at that time. They are now.

Let’s go back to Silver Peak, and I want to explore this just a little bit more. What about religious differences? Was there a church in town at the time you were growing up? No? What did people do about religion? Were you aware of different religions—Catholics, Protestants?

Oh, yes, but there just wasn’t a church there at that time.

Were there any disagreements about religion or any conflicts?

Not to my knowledge.

It just wasn’t a big issue.

We were Methodists. When we were in Goldfield we never missed Sunday school.

There was a church there?

Oh, yes.

And a minister?

Oh, there was, sure.

And it was a Methodist church?

No, there was a Methodist, a Presbyterian, and a Catholic. Oh, there was all kinds of stuff.

So that was the closest for Silver Peak if people wanted to go to church?

Yes. But, you know, when people work seven days a week, it was pretty hard to do that. But like my dad used to say, people could be just as religious at home.

We were talking the other day about the origination of the mill. I don’t know if you’re interested in that now or not.

Yes, I am. Go ahead.

Well, when they first started that, during the time when my dad and my uncle and, I think, my cousin helped build that mill, too.

And this is the Black Mammoth Mill?

That’s the flotation plant. That was the first one. That was when Silver Peak first started to come back.

OK. And about what year would that have been when they worked on that?

Oh, probably 1929, 1930, somewhere along . . .

OK, so you would have still been a kid—about nine, ten. No, you would have been twelve, thirteen.

Well, in 1928 I'd have been eleven, so I was probably about twelve or thirteen. Well, they were working on that when I was eleven. I remember that. They were working on it, but I don't think they got through with it. It took a while to build because they had to . . . First they had to level off the place they wanted, and this is all on a hillside. And they also had to put a tank up there on top of the hill.

For water?

For water. And they had to get water up to it some way. I don't know where the water came from, to tell you the truth. And then, they had to get the mill, the parts, and put it together.

Shipped in?

So anyway, they had some parts that were due to come from Los Angeles, and, I think, that was to finish the mill off. And so the Smith brothers, they . . . There were three brothers and a sister, and they were Canadian people. And then, they had a partner by the name of Tom Cox, and they went together and borrowed or [used] the money they had or something. They got a couple of beat-up, old trucks. And they were the ones that were going to haul this steel stuff into Silver Peak. And so, Wingfield went and shut the banks down in the state of Nevada and maybe . . . I don't know where else, but I think banks all over the country were closed. The Black Mammoth had their

money in the First National Bank over in Tonopah, so they didn't have any money [after the banks closed]. And the Smith brothers weren't going to bring the material, because they had to have some money.

To finish the mill?

My dad had some postal savings, so he drew out postal savings to pay for this. They got it paid for, and they put this flotation plant in. I think they called it a thirty-ton. It might have run thirty-ton, but it was built for twenty-five, but they could probably force it a little. Anyway, they completed the mill, and then they started milling.

We'll very briefly go through it. They grind it through jaw crushers just like they



"I think banks all over the country were closed. The Black Mammoth had their money in the First National Bank over in Tonopah, so they didn't have any money [after the banks closed]. . . My dad had some postal savings, so he drew out postal savings to pay for this. They got it paid for, and they put this flotation plant in." Side view of the Black Mammoth cyanide mill. (Photograph courtesy of Leon Hill.)

did at the other. Then they go through a ball mill. And then they cut through a set of plates, and these plates are probably, oh, I'd say four or five feet wide and maybe about ten feet long. It was on a smooth sheet of copper, and they'd take mercury, and they would spread that all over on the copper where it would hold it. (Or I don't know if that would eat copper or not. Maybe it's lead. I don't know what the plates were. I still think it was copper. It seems like they had copper to me.)

But anyway, then as the mud would come down through the ball mill, that come down over the plates, and the mercury would pick up the free gold. And then the rest of the stuff would go down into a flotation system where they put sweet oil, and this would go into this machine, and it would agitate it with the sweet oil. The sweet oil would pick up the minerals and put them over the sides, and that would go down into the concentrator. Then they'd go into dryers; then they were gathered up and shipped off somewhere to a smelter—someplace where they would smelt it and return money. Then they'd clean those plates off with that mercury, and it would make a ball of mercury with the gold attached to it—saturated with gold. Then they'd take it down, and they'd put it into a retort. And a retort is no more than a kind of a crucible-type thing, and they stick it in there. But it's got a tube on it where it goes up in the air like condensation. And when you heat that, then the heat would force . . . the mercury would go into like steam, and it would go out and over and drop in there, and that way they would recover at least a lot of their mercury.

So it would go up, out through that tube and be recovered.

Right. And what was left in there then was a powder gold. And that, my dad would usually put into a coffee can; then he'd

solder the coffee can shut, take it over to Tonopah to Wells Fargo, and Wells Fargo would ship it off, and it would come back from the smelter in gold coin. And then the company would get a sack full of gold coins, and that's how they paid all their expenses and paid their employees and paid everything.

Completely different than the process where you came out with the bar of gold.

That's right. And then the bar, you don't have anything left to ship. In the precipitate, you smelt it right there. That's the whole ball of wax. When you finished that, that's it.

But in the flotation mill, it came out as a dust, a powder, and that was sealed up and sent off and then further processed into the coins. Is that correct?

Oh, yes. But they would just find out how fine the gold was, how much of it was still mercury or something. And anyway, they'd clean it up, and they would pay them based on the value of that gold. They wouldn't necessarily pay them for that [particular powder], but [based on it], that's what they'd pay them for, though.

It wasn't necessarily that particular gold that was turned into coin, but they would assess its value and then pay the money when it came back.

Once they found out what it was worth, they'd pay it in gold. And that's how they got it back.

Along with that story is the story of the Smith brothers. They had a sister by the name of Allison. She seemed to be the manager of the outfit. Tom Cox knew about trucks. I don't know what the other specialty was about. [laughter] But it seemed like Allison was the manager, and Tom Cox was the trucker. Anyway, somebody had a little

vision, and they saw that Silver Peak was going to boom. Well, there was a little store there, just a crummy little I used to work in it sometimes just for fun when I was a kid. And they sold potatoes and carrots and . . .

Fresh produce mostly?

If they could get it, but people weren't much interested in hauling anything out there. There was only half a dozen people or a dozen or so people who lived there before that. And so mostly when they wanted something like that, they'd go to Tonopah, and they'd buy stuff for a month at a time, most of the residents. But anyway, they had this little old store, and it really didn't have hardly anything. They did have cold pop, which was great for us kids.

Wonderful treat.

But other than that they didn't have just about anything. And to get gasoline, you couldn't get gas there hardly at all. If somebody came to town and needed some gas, he'd find somebody who had a barrel in his backyard, and they'd give it to them probably.

But there wasn't a gas station or a pump or anything at that point?

So the Smith brothers, they bought that little old store, and then they started building it. And from that they built the Northern Transportation Company, made with a fleet of diesel trucks, and the store was tremendous. It was like a great general store. They had a lumber yard. They had plumbing. They . . . hardware, a soda fountain, a grocery store; just about anything you wanted, they had it. And if you didn't have it, they'd get it for you, because they hauled out of L.A. regularly. And not

only to Silver Peak but to all those other places around.

So they started kind of a chain of stores. They had stores in other areas where they hauled it around?

I don't know that they had stores, but they had hauling contracts.

Ah, OK.

And they hauled stuff, because in no time at all it's *amazing* how fast they built. I imagine they went out on a limb, and somebody really had confidence in the area, or they probably would never have loaned them what they needed to build so fast.

Yes, so they built up the store, and then they had the trucks so they could bring in supplies, and they could also haul these supplies to the other little mining towns wherever it was needed. Is that correct?

Well, not only that. I think it was his sister, she went around to some of these places like, well, Tonopah, Mina, Hawthorne, all the way to Reno, Winnemucca, Las Vegas. She went around there and seen who needed something hauled and when they needed it.

Took orders?

And all they had to do was to send the orders in, and they would give them the order for the Northern Transportation to pick it up. They had a pick up service in Los Angeles, and they'd pick that up and moved it to the various places. And so they had a tremendous hauling. They later sold that to the Rigsby Corporation. You remember, Rigsby was here in Reno? And I don't remember who they sold it to. It was sold again. But that was a big outfit.

Then that's where they got their start was in Silver Peak.

That's right.

Because they went on from there, is that correct, when they opened stores in other areas?

Oh, yes. They had a store up at Gabbs, and they also had the Bucket of Blood saloon up there at Gabbs. They had the El Capitan down at Hawthorne, and after that, I don't know. I think they moved back to California. I don't know what they did after that.

Yes. But that's where they got their start. They could see that Silver Peak was going to open up, and more people would come there.

That's right. They must have been visionaries, I guess. Somebody was. I always heard it was Allison. A lot of women are smarter than men anyway. [laughter]

[laughter] That's one of the families that, you know, kind of made a mark in Silver Peak. And you also knew the Chiatovich family and a number of the people there.

Oh, yes, sure.

Could you talk a little bit about who you knew and how you knew them?

Well, I knew all the Chiatoviches. I can't remember when we first went to Fish Lake Valley. We'd . . . always seemed like it was forever, out there going fishing. Didn't matter whether we were in Silver Peak or Goldfield.

Was the Chiatovich family out at Fish Lake Valley?

They had a ranch there. At that time, the boys were smaller, of course, than the girl, Margie. I don't know for sure how many Chiatoviches there were, but . . .

Tell me the names of the ones you remember.

Well, of the older ones . . . I didn't know Grandpa Chiatovich, but I knew Marco and Martin and John and Cecil. And there was a sister, but I didn't know her. She was at the ranch all the time. As far as I know Martin's the only one who had kids. And he had . . . I think Stanley was the oldest. And then Jack. And then Pat, then Margie, and then Bob.

And were any of them close in age to you?

Yes, Bob was my age. Margie was older than Bob, and Margie and my brother were married for a short while. They got drunk one night and got married. I don't think they were married very long.

And your brother was named . . .

Fayette. And he died when he was twenty-three. He got peritonitis out at Silver Peak. He had lifted an ore car and strained himself and thought it was just a strain and took a physic, and then it got worse. He finally went to Tonopah, because there wasn't any doctor in Silver Peak. And Dr. Craig over there operated on him. But by that time he had peritonitis; it spread all through his body. Then my other brother, Elwood, was a couple years older than me, and he died when he was fifty-three with a heart-attack. And then there was me and then my sister Gerry, and next to her was Mary. Mary died when she was probably, ten, I think, and she got pneumonia and passed away. And then there was Virginia and Lois and Dorothy. There were eight of us altogether.

And you lost two of your . . . a brother and a sister at really young ages.

Yes, one at ten and one at twenty-three.

Were you at home when they each passed away?

Yes. Well, Mary got sick out at Silver Peak, but we were out there on a weekend. Fayette . . . I was living at Silver Peak then, because I was out of school by that time.

OK. You were out on your own?

In fact, I was married then. In fact, (this is kind of off the subject) but when I was first married, my wife had taken . . . what do they call it? Teaches you how to do all these things, cook and all that stuff?

Home ec?

Home ec. My wife was taking home ec, and anyway, my brother gave us his house to live in. And when we came home from our honeymoon, we stopped by Wilma's folks, and her brother kept saying, "Why don't you go home. Why don't you go home." And I wondered why he wanted to get rid of us so bad! [laughter] So we went home, and what they had done was, they had bought us a kitchenette set, a new stove, and the house was completely furnished! [laughter]

Wow!

Everything was set up, all ready to light a fire. Of course, you know, we didn't have any running water there.

How did you get water?

We had to carry it.

From where?

Well, up there by where my dad lived, right below that. That pump . . . where I dug that happy little old ditch . . . [laughter]

Yes, that's where you got the water?

Well, they had a hose there, and it was a community hose. There was also wells around, but rather than pull a bunch of water up, you'd go up there and get it out of that. I had a couple of milk buckets, and I'd pour it in that. And my folks had a bathtub, so we could go up there to take a bath, but we generally got most of our baths out at the reservoir.

Was that the deep hole?

No.

At the reservoir—the one that's right close in town?

The reservoir. The deep hole was salt water. Yes, and you go down at the reservoir about three-thirty or four when people were getting off work, there were all kinds of people down there with their towel and their soap and their shampoos, and they were running up, jumping in, and washing off. Of course, the water was cold, so I don't know how good it was, but we thought it was OK.

But it was like a community bath?

That's right.

Because there was no running water, that was the best way to get clean.

Sure.

How did you wash clothes with no running water? How did you do laundry?

Oh, they had . . . well, what they were was a couple of tubs. One of them was a

round tub like . . . I don't know what they call them now, washtubs, I think. And then they had this container that they called a boiler. They are probably about three feet or three and a half feet long and maybe a foot wide, and maybe . . .

OK, kind of a tub.

Yes, maybe eighteen inches tall, something like that, and it had wooden handles on the end. And that was so that when you put them over a fire they'd get hot. And so you put water in there, and then you build a fire outside, and you'd heat the water in that. And then you dumped it into the washtub. And then you put your little old washing board in there, and you scrubbed.

Scrubbed by hand. So everybody did their own in this manner?

Yes.

They would heat the water in the boiler, pour it into a washtub. And both of those are just like, what, galvanized tin or something?

Yes, they were galvanized. I expect that there were washer women that would do . . . like for the miners and people like that. For most of the families, they did their own.

They did their own. But a woman could do washing for the miners, say, who didn't have a family.

But then later, shortly after we were married, well my mother had a washing machine. And so we didn't do that, but that's what most people did. And Wilma's mother also had a washing machine.

What was the washing machine like? Was it the old wringer-type washing machine?

Sure.

Was it run by electricity or by hand?

It was run by electricity. Well, they also had those, too. They had those kind that was run by little motors.

Oh, like a gasoline motor?

Yes. But they weren't very successful. Primarily, we had electricity.

You had electricity, just not running water. That was the problem.

That's right. And well, my mother had running water, too. Well, so did Wilma's mother, because they sunk a well and had a pump.

OK. So if you had a well and a pump, then you'd have water right at your house.

That's right.

But not every house had a well and a pump. OK.

But when we built our house, then we had water, but we didn't before that.

I see, OK.

But the washing machine, I remember, my mother had a Maytag, and it just had a . . . one of these swishers in it.

An agitator.

Agitator, yes. And so she'd agitate it, and then up on the top of it, it had a wringer, and it was electric. Then you'd have a basket on the other side where you'd catch it after it came out [of the wringer] and then take it out and hang it on a line.

Was it one tub or two tubs, do you remember?

One tub.

One tub, OK. All right. So there was adequate water for cooking. Were you able to drink the water?

It had been checked several times by the Nevada health people. And they said that, if it wasn't for the large amount of mineral in there, it would be fit for human consumption. I remember old man Shirley was eighty-some-odd years old. Oh, they told him his well wasn't any good; he couldn't drink it. He said, "Ah, I've been drinking it for eighty-some-odd years, and I'm not dead yet." [laughter]

So people did drink the water, although it didn't pass health standards.

Yes, we drank it.

You didn't haul in bottled or anything. You drank the water, used it for laundry and bathing.

There was a fellow, later, from Fish Lake Valley, and his name was Ely. And he'd come over there, and he'd peddle fish and dairy products and produce and meat. The fish he'd sell would be trout he'd catch. It was always doubtful whether they were any good or not. [laughter] And he was a real nice fellow, but he'd come down by the Mary Mine, and he'd manage to come down there about noontime—well, whatever time they go to lunch. But I think they ate lunch generally around eleven o'clock, because they went to work at seven.

At seven, OK.

And he'd come down about lunch time, and all kinds of people would buy milk. A

matter of fact, every time I'd see him I'd buy a quart of milk to drink with my lunch. And we bought meat from him. Well, he was a friend of ours, and we liked him. So one time they invited us over for something, and we went over there, and they were butchering. And they butchered right by where they milked. Right after they milked, they went out there, and they put this bucket down, and they put a strainer in the bucket. They'd pour the milk that they get from the cows, they'd pour it through that strainer, and they'd have to stop every little while and dump the flies out, so they could run all that milk through. And we never bought another bottle of milk, and we never ate another piece of their meat.

[laughter] Of their steak? Because of the flies?

Oh, and they were really hurt. But, oh, golly, you couldn't believe how bad they were. And you think of all those people on the hill was drinking that.

Drinking that milk. That wasn't under sanitary conditions at all.

Oh, it was terrible. And the water that he sold, because some people wanted the water, the water did taste good out of one of those creeks. But maybe a bunch of cows had just took a bath right there! [laughter]

So that wasn't sanitary either, but it tasted better than the water in Silver Peak?

Oh, yes. Oh, heck yes. It had that nice Well, when we'd go up there fishing, we'd drink it. You know, I never knew you couldn't drink water out of a creek until I left for the service.

Really? That it wasn't healthy. But there was definitely a taste to Silver Peak's water then, a different taste.

You know, when you went away from Silver Peak and drank someone else's water, you didn't like it a lot at first, because it didn't have any body to it. [laughter] You could pretty near chew the Silver Peak water! [laughter]

[laughter] Yes, but when you grew up on it, you didn't notice the difference. It was only when you went away from home that you could tell.

That's right. But anyway, to get back to the Chiatoviches . . . they all passed away except Cecil. I don't know if Cecil's still alive or not, but the last I heard he was. And I don't know anything about Cecil's offspring, because they moved to Reno, and as far as I know, they live here yet. They would have been here in Reno, so I wouldn't know whether anything happened to any of them. But Margie and Stanley and Bob all had untimely deaths.

Bob was a friend of yours. I mean, you knew him.

Oh yes. I knew all of them. I was real close to Jack. And Pat just died here a few years ago.

Yes, I think 1991, because I've seen his obituary. Did you tell me that you were roommates [with Bob] at one time? When was that?

That was sometime between 1935 and 1937.

After you were still out of high school?

Yes, because that was before I was married. I was married in 1937 We were always friends. Every time I'd see him, we would be friends. And the same way with Jack. Every time he come to Hawthorne, he'd come to see us. But then Stanley, of

course, he had that unfortunate illness. But he sure raised some nice girls.

Yes, I've met Barbara, and I'm going to be talking to Janice and Jaci.

Yes, there's probably Barbara and Janice and Jaci.

Yes. Anything else on the Chiatoviches, because they were very active in the mining business in Silver Peak, too.

Stanley was. Well sure, the old man was too. Martin was active in mining, but not too much around Silver Peak. He seemed to be mostly around those mines over around Hawthorne. I'm not familiar with him. But I know because Bob mentioned where he was at all the time, and most of the time Johnny had came over to Silver Peak after they left the ranch, and John, he was quite a skilled carpenter, and he did a lot of building and remodeling stuff on houses around Silver Peak. And that was during that building phase anyway so he

When the town was growing, he did a lot of the building in town?

Yes. And Marco came over there and worked the service station and did other things. Seemed to me he run the mail for a while or something. I don't remember.



You and the rest of the brothers and sisters were still alive when you lost your brother and sister.

Yes. If Fayette hadn't taken the physic, he But back in those days that was the thing: if you got a stomachache, take a physic.

A physic was like what today?

Well, it's castor oil back in those days, or Epsom salts.

Like a laxative then.

Boy, was it ever! [laughter] Oh, I hated that. And every spring we had to take sulphur and molasses.

What was that for?

It was supposed to thin our blood. And . . . we had to take it too. Boy! God, I hated that.

How much of that did you have to take? Sulphur and molasses?

Oh, not very much. But that was one of the things that was . . .

So, in lieu of a doctor being nearby, there were some home remedies that were used on a regular basis?

Oh, yes. Sure.

Sulphur and molasses or a physic or anything else that you can remember that your family . . . maybe mother had as home remedies? You put peroxide on when you stepped on a nail. Didn't go get a tetanus shot. Or did you?

Didn't even know there was such a thing. I don't think I had my first tetanus [shot] until I went in the service. And there weren't a lot of doctors anyway. Well, I had an abscess on a lung when I was eleven years old. This was over at Goldfield where we used to go upstairs and box. We had a ring up there, and we'd box. This is where the fireman slept, and they had cardboard over the hole there by the fireman's bar.

Where they slid down the pole to go fight fires?

That's right. They would slide down that pole. So he put cardboard over there so we wouldn't kick dirt or something down on the people down below, because a bunch of old fellows would sit around down there and chew tobacco and tell lies.

[laughter]

So, anyway, when we got ready to leave there, we got in a hurry. And everyone wanted to be first. I wanted to be first, so I ran over there; I stepped too far over, and I stepped on the cardboard, and I went through. And I fell down there and my back hit against a chair. And anyway, I was going to school, and I got to where I didn't want to eat, and I had a discharge of puss coming out my ear. I don't remember if it was both ears or just one. And so they took me to the doctor, and the doctor there was Dr. Cherry. I think he got his license from the vets or somebody.

So he checks my ear, and he said he was treating me for inflammation of the ear. And I got to where I couldn't breathe. Well, school had just got out, and we were about to go to Silver Peak. And we were all ready to go, and I couldn't breathe. It seemed like I could only breathe out to about here [indicating upper portion of chest]. And there was a new doctor, just came to town, and his name was Dr. Dibbell. And the minute he saw me, as soon as he checked me and put this thing on, he knew what was wrong. And he got out a great big needle, and they'd hold me, and he poked this needle in there into my lung . . . my right lung, and they sucked this stuff out—a mixture of blood and puss. And he filled the wash basin pretty near full with that (the kind of basin that you wash your hands in, that type). And my temperature was . . . it got up as high as 108. And oh, boy, I was sick.

I guess.

That's how I knew what year it was when they were building that mill, because I was eleven then.

Yes, and you were really sick.

And when I got up from there, I went out there, and they said now I could go out, but to take it easy. Well, hell, I ran all over those hills and went swimming. God, I had a ball! But they were building that mill then, that flotation plant, one of them. And so, I remember going up there and watching while they were doing that, climbing that hill.

And did you have any antibiotics or anything after these procedures?

No.

That's . . . it's incredible that you lived after that.

I didn't take any medicine at all. Well, he'd use alcohol when he put that needle in me. He did that . . . every time he'd listen with his stethoscope. And I guess he'd hear fluid down there, and so they'd poked me with that dang needle again. God, I hated that needle! And then I had to eat spinach, and . . .

As part of your treatment, you had to eat some spinach to get strong again?

Yes, that was it. That was going to give me a lot of iron. That's when it was primarily diet. But I don't think there was anything I couldn't have. And I loved to read—always have. And so I wanted to read, and, of course, there was no television then. But I probably couldn't watch it, anyway. But he didn't want me to read, because that would take too much of my strength, which I didn't think so. But anyway, he said I could embroidery. So I did. [laughter] You know,

it's a funny thing—now I like spinach all right now, but at that time I didn't. And I had to eat it.

Then the other time that I got sick in my life (I don't know if you're interested in my getting sick) . . .

Yes, this is important.

But this was just before I went into the service. I already knew I was going to go. And I was working out of Hawthorne, and they were putting a power line from Hawthorne to Lee Vining to the navy so they'd have more power. And so we'd get up at seven o'clock in the morning, or . . . that's when we're supposed to go to work. And so at seven o'clock in the morning we were down there, and a truck'd pick us up and take us over there, and we'd work on this pipeline. Well, we'd be out there from seven in the morning until a lot of times it would be nine o'clock at night before we come home. Because there was snow on the ground, see, and we'd have to stop, and we'd build a fire once in a while to get warm. They had a flatbed truck, and they put a canvas over it, and we set in the back. Oh, God, it was cold! And then we got over to the hill there, Palmetto Hill, out of Hawthorne, and . . . or not Palmetto Hill. I don't know what the heck the hill is there.

The hill right before you come into Hawthorne?

Yes. And they'd go out there on the pole line road, and they'd have to have a Cat to take us over the hill, because this snow was on the road. They had a Cat sitting there, and we'd have to build a fire under the Cat to get it warm enough so we could start it. And then they'd start it, and it would tow us over the hill. And so a lot of times we wouldn't get to work till eleven o'clock or twelve, and then we'd work till maybe four or five. It'd get dark early in the winter. And then we'd

come home. So anyway, I got to where I wasn't hungry. I got nauseated. I'd just think of food, and it'd make me sick. So I come into Reno. We were living here. I was just out there working, and my wife was going to business college.

And so I went to the doctor, and he said Well, I was eating at the restaurant down there. For breakfast I'd have bacon and eggs, ham and eggs or something. For lunch they'd probably give me a ham sandwich, and for dinner I'd have a steak and fried potatoes. Everything was fried. He said I ate so much grease that it was causing my bile to come up like that. And so I didn't have to take much medication there either. But what I *had* to do was to drink buttermilk and eat lamb chops. That's just two things I don't really care about.

Yes, I bet! [laughter]

There was three things in my life that I had to take, and I didn't care about them.

And so even as a child, food was part of what you did to get healthy or to return to health.

Sure.

And even in the 1940s as a young man, food was still part of the cure.

Yes.

I want to go back and ask you You mentioned boxing in Goldfield. What other sports were there for kids to do when you were growing up?

Goldfield?

Yes. Well, Goldfield or Silver Peak. Were there organized sports to get involved in?

Organized? Well, no. Well, backyard, sandlot baseball and stuff like that. But . . .

The kids organized themselves.

Oh, yes. And at night they had various games they'd play. And, you know, when the kids'd hear you playing, everybody knew everyone, so everyone was there. At Silver Peak, that was a real community deal, you know. People would go out and play ball out on the flats, and pretty soon everybody in town was out there. And they'd bring stuff to eat. Whatever they had to eat they would share, and heck, sometimes I don't think there were a half a dozen people left in town.

So, was it softball, baseball?

Both.

Men, women, boys, girls?

Both. And you'd be surprised at the people who'd be playing at some of those games.

Like who?

Well, like my dad might be on second base, and my sister might be the catcher. [laughter]

So it was a whole family.

Everybody.

All ages.

Oh, yes. And they were a real town of participants. Now that softball team that you saw, the girls, that took practically everybody in town, all the women at that time, to do that.

Were they all young women, high school girls?

No. No. My sister was in high school. And, of course, my wife was just out. She was just shortly married.

Yes, so it was women of all ages on this team.

Yes, and that Olive . . . well, whatever her name was. I don't remember her last name—Olive something. I thought she was elderly, but I was younger, so . . . [laughter]

But mature women were on the team too.

Oh, yes. Sure.

OK. And this team became well-known.

Oh, listen, they had a heck of a team. But their coach, Walt Lyle, boy, he was a real tough coach. And he kept their nose to the grindstone.

Was that his only job, coaching this team, or was he . . .

Oh, no. He worked for the power company.

So this was something that people did in their spare time.

They did, after they got off work or whenever they could do it. And the men had a baseball team, and they were the same way. They had a softball team, too.

So how did they play? Did they just play each other there in town, or did they travel around and play out of town?

Oh, no. Oh, no, some of those teams, they played the towns around. You know, they'd play Tonopah, Battle Mountain, Round Mountain—places that weren't too far.

Because your sister, Gerry, said that her team became state champions. Is that correct?

They did. They went to Reno, and the mayor's name . . . was it Mayor Frolic, Foley? [Frohlich] Something like that? He was the mayor at that time, and they introduced them on the radio, and they had an award for them [for winning first place in the state].



Leon, what was postal savings? It's one of the things that we wanted to define from a previous tape.

Well, I'm not really an expert on this, because I never did have any, I don't think. [laughter]

OK, but your dad had postal savings?

Yes. Well, you see, so many of the people lived away from banks and things of that sort in those days. Out in the West they didn't have a lot of those things yet.

And there wasn't a bank in Silver Peak, for example.

No. But, of course, these postal savings, I think, were in Goldfield. Nonetheless, they kind of took the place of banks . . . not take the place of them, but they augmented them, you might say. And a lot of people didn't trust banks anyway. A long time ago, banks were held up a lot, but post offices weren't, as a general rule, I guess. A post office paid a little bit of interest, and so when people wanted to save money they could put it in postal savings, which I suppose is nearly what a bond is now, a government bond maybe. Although I know anybody could do it. You just go down there and get postal savings and put it in there. If you need your money, you could draw it out.

And when Wingfield closed the banks in Nevada, that did not affect the postal savings?

No.

So people who had their money there could still get their money.

That's true.

OK. And that's how [your father] got the money so they could pay for the transportation and the equipment up there? And that was for the flotation mill.

That's right. When they built the first mill.



From there, on the last tape we were talking about sports, organized and informal sports, and recreational activities. And we had talked a little bit about the whole town coming out for baseball games out on the dry lake bed. We'd just barely gotten started on the women's softball team that won the state championship. But I'd like to just have you kind of remember some of the different activities. Maybe you could start with the softball team and tell me a little bit more about it. You have a picture of it, and that was about 1938.

Yes, I'm sure. I'm pretty sure it was 1938.

OK. And you mentioned that there were about ten women on the team?

That's what they were. Well, that was softball . . . has ten players. And that took about every available woman that could do it. [laughter]

Of all ages, right?

Yes. Of course, most of them were young. The older ones didn't want to be involved. Well, they couldn't very well be involved in organized ball with all that practice stuff, because they had a husband they had to cook for and . . .

Children often.

. . . and all of those things. So they had to take care of, you know, their wifely duties, whatever they were.

So, but you mentioned one person, your sister, who was twelve that played on it, and then there were young women who were out of high school who were on it. Is that right?

Well, of that group that were out of high school, there was my wife. Of course, she had just got out of high school. [laughter]

OK. And were the two of you married when she was playing softball, or was that before you were married?

No, we were married before she was playing. And Olive, she must have been . . . I thought she was elderly, but she was probably in her late twenties or thirties. [laughter]

You were just right out of high school, too? Not very long.

Yes. At that time I was only about, you know, twenty-one. Well, she must have been older than twenty. She must have been in her thirties, but she was the oldest one.

OK. That was Olive.

Oh, and Kathleen Spaethe, or whatever her name was; she married Jimmy Morris later after he was divorced. And she was out of high school, but just barely. She came out

of high school when she came out there. So, basically, they were a high school team.

But the men, they also had a softball team and a baseball team and basketball teams, but we made these all up ourselves. We're just a bunch of guys who got together that liked to do it, and we didn't have any coaches or anything like that. And we'd just go out and play ball. And then later, if somebody around Goldfield or Tonopah or Manhattan, or somebody that had a team, we'd challenge them, and we'd go play ball with them.

OK. So it was all pretty informal, but it was also fairly regular, is that right?

Yes.

You'd get together regularly and play other towns?

Yes, we did. But it was very unorganized in that respect, in that you never knew who was going to play, and whoever wasn't on a shift at that time when we were playing. [laughter]

Oh, right, because the mill ran twenty-four hours a day.

That's right. And . . .

. . . your team would vary. [laughter]

And some of the time some of the mines would operate sixteen hours a day, and once in a while twenty-four, but that wasn't very often.

Yes, so the shift work really affected the sports.

Oh, yes.

But it didn't stop the sports at all?

No, there was enough people who wanted to do it. And it's surprising how old some of the guys were.

What would you say were the oldest guys playing on the team?

Oh, we had guys playing probably forty-five or fifty. To me, I thought they were ancient.

Yes, of course. Well, you were twenty-one right? [laughter]

Yes, age is relative, I guess. [laughter]

Tell me some of the other things Swimming—everybody that I've talked to mentioned swimming, either in the reservoir or out in the big hole out in the playa.

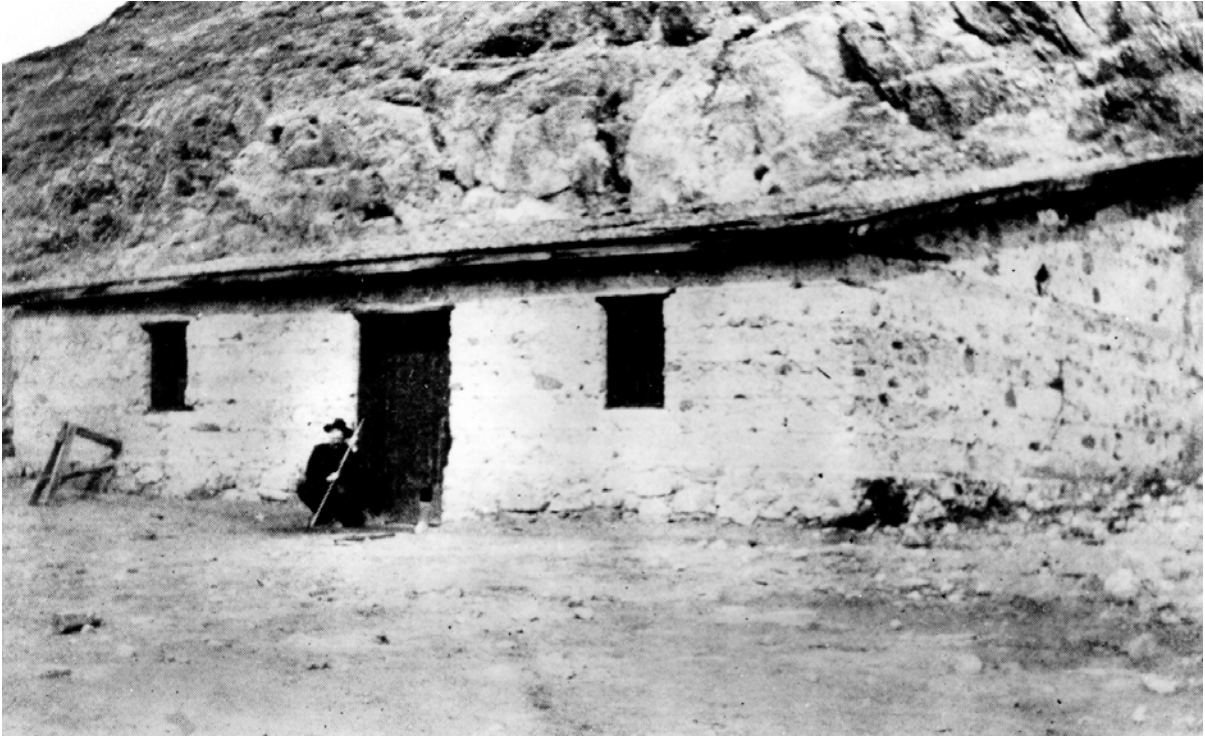
Yes. Sure.

Talk to me about swimming. Was that a sport, or was it just something that people did?

Oh, yes, it was a sport, because a lot of the people who weren't working or had some other method of bathing or something, they didn't go there for that purpose. But when people come home from work, generally speaking, that's where they would go to clean up. They'd go down there and take a swim, take soap with them and a bath towel, and they'd scrub up. Of course, it was cold water, so it probably wasn't quite as good as a warm shower. [laughter] And some people, though, they made their own showers.

In their homes?

Yes, and what they would do is, they'd put a barrel or something on the roof, and they usually had to hoist the water.



“[T]hat stone building there . . . I don’t know if it’s still a jail. It was a jail later. Before that though, it was open, and it had a dirt floor, and a lot of the times there’d be horses in there, but they didn’t care if you changed your clothes in there.” Jailhouse used as changing room for swimming in the reservoir. (Photograph courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society, Acc. # ESM 809.)

Somebody would hoist it up, and they’d take it up, and they’d dump water in this thing, and then the sun would heat it during the day. And then they come home at night, and then they could take a shower.

Oh. OK. But the ones that used the reservoir, they’d bring their soap and towels. Was there a place to change clothes into bathing suits? How did they do that?

They generally would go into that stone building there that’s . . . I don’t know if it’s still a jail. It was a jail later. Before that, though, it was open, and it had a dirt floor, and a lot of the times there’d be horses in there, but they didn’t care if you changed your clothes in there. [laughter]

[laughter] And this is the stone building. It still stands, actually. It’s kind of backed up against a hill.

Yes.

Was there ever any nude bathing in the reservoir? Did people go in without swimming suits or clothes?

Sure. But generally that would be the young guys, if there were no women around. Yes, I did. You know, a lot of times, we’d go down there, and if we had no women around, we’d a lot rather do that, because it’s a lot easier to take a bath without a bathing suit on. [laughter]

Right. [laughter] Was the swimming hole out in the playa, in the dry lake bed, also used for bathing or mostly the reservoir?

Well, mostly the reservoir because that out there was salty.

OK. And for swimming for sport, where did that happen? At both places?

Yes, but generally at the reservoir, because it was a much nicer place to swim. I don't even know why we ever swam out there at that other one. Well, yes, I do, in one way. Sometimes we had organized ball games out there, and the backstop itself was not very far from there. It would get real hot, so people would wear a bathing suit, and they'd go jump in the pool and cool off once in a while.

Come back and play ball, huh?

Well, no, the players did not get to do that. But that was the people who'd . . .

Oh, the audience got to do that. [laughter]

The spectators got to do that.

And you'd be surprised at the kid games they would play, the young adults. Out there at that dry salt bed, you know, there was so much room to run around with a car. There weren't even sand dunes out in there. They wouldn't grow in that.

It's just flat. Totally flat.

Yes. So we'd go out there and have a watermelon feed. And then afterwards we'd be in a couple of cars, these old cars we had, and touring cars always—with no top on it. So we'd drive around and throw watermelon rinds at each other as we passed. You can't believe the dumb things we'd do. We'd play games like kick the can and steal the sticks and all that stuff.

And then something that wasn't very nice that we'd do, we'd go around to some of these houses where somebody's husband was working nights, and we'd pull the switch on her electric. The lights would go off, and you'd say, "Help, help, I'm dying." [Said in a very creepy voice] [laughter]

[laughter] To try to scare the person.

And we'd scare her to death. And at Ma Brown's restaurant—that was after she got the new restaurant down where Jimmy Gavin later built his. And we went out there, and there was an old French man that cleaned up after the business closed. And then they closed fairly early there, about eight o'clock probably. And so, after it'd get dark, we'd go over there, and we'd take a real thin piece of wire, and we'd tie it onto . . . or we wouldn't tie it, we'd double it. See, we'd run it through the loop on the door handle and bring it back so you had the whole thing, so you had both ends. And then, when you got ready to, you could let go of one end and pull it, see, loose. So we'd go over there, and the wind wouldn't be blowing; we'd wait for a quiet night. Then you'd pull that door and the screen on it, which brings the screen door back, and slam the door a few times. And pretty soon that guy, he'd come out and look around. I guess they didn't have a lock on that. I'm sure they didn't. Or if they did have, we took it off, probably. He'd come out there two or three times, and pretty soon he closed that whole place without cleaning up. [laughter] Ma Brown was going to fire him, because he didn't do his job! [laughter] But it was because the door was slamming. Yes, he was scared. He thought it was a ghost.

So anyway, I went down and told her that we had done it. [laughter]

So she didn't fire him after all?

But you can see the kind of things we did for amusement, you know. And then, of

course, there was always the Saturday night dance. That was something that, no matter what, there was a Saturday night dance.

And kids and adults went to that?

Everybody went, and that was generally in the saloon. That's the only place they had enough space. It was either the one saloon or the other. They had one over at Shirley's or over at Perry White's.

Yes. Was it live music? Did people play instruments?

Sometimes, depending. Otherwise it was a jukebox. But most everyone came out.

And, of course, I told you about the skiing.

Tell me again. Did you ski summer and winter?

Well, yes, on the sand dunes, but you had to get up on a real steep sand dune. And then you can ski on it, but it didn't do your skis a lot of good. [laughter]

You would scratch them up?

Oh, yes. Of course, there was a lot of snow there on the mountains. Well, the mountains are pretty high.

In the wintertime, you had plenty of snow?

Yes, in the wintertime there was a lot of snow. In fact, there was a lot more snow than we liked, especially when I was driving truck up and down the Mary Hill. [laughter]

Up to the Mary Mine, because that's a pretty steep hill.

Oh, yes. They always kept a Cat up there, Caterpillar. And they'd clear the road

a little bit. There you had to put chains on and all that.

You'd have to stop and chain up when you got up there?

Heck of a nuisance. Yes.

Yes. So you did mostly cross-country skiing? Is that the kind of skis that you had—cross-country skis?

In fact, we made a lot of our own skis. What you take is about a one-by-four or a one-by-six, and then you trim it down. You trim it the way you want it, with the pointed toe and all that, then you'd put it in boiling water, and you'd leave it in this hot water for hours, and then it would bend.

So you could bend up the tips.

You could bend up the tip. And then you put it on a board, and they had a way of bracing it and hooking it up there until it dried, and it would dry that way. And then you'd used a groover, and you'd groove it and wax it. We didn't have clamps as they have later. All we had was a toe strap that you slide your foot into. And sometimes you'd lose it. We tried to avoid jumps as much as possible, although sometimes you'd go to where there was a cut there, and you'd take off. And sometimes, if you were lucky, you landed straight up and nothing would hurt you. [laughter]

Mostly you landed down?

That's right. We weren't very proficient, you know. And I know there was one time where my wife and I were skiing, and we were up on this hill where there was a lot of snow. But it was kind of a foreign place to us. It was clear on top, up above Coyote Springs. And we come down off this hill, and she was ahead of me. Anyway, she hit



"In fact, we made a lot of our own skis. . . We weren't very proficient, you know. And I know there was one time when my wife and I were skiing . . . and there was about a fifty-foot hole there that she would have slid down into if she would have kept going." Wilma Hill, Leon's wife, skiing near the Mary Mine at Silver Peak. The tram can be seen in the background. (Photograph courtesy of Leon Hill.)

something, a corner of a stump or something, and she lost a ski. And right down in the path where she'd have been, there was a bunch of weeds and stuff under the snow, and then on top of that was the snow. And that ski went over there, and it went right over the end, and there was about a fifty-foot hole there that she would have slid down in, if she would have kept going. [laughter]

Whoa, boy. So what you did was actually make like the old long boards that they originally skied on around this area?

That's right.

But you made your own?

Yes. Well . . . I'll tell you though, for somebody that knew something about skiing . . . One time Goldfield was snowed in for twenty-six days during a bad winter. I think that was in 1932. And there was a fellow that was stranded there from Minnesota. His car was in the shop getting worked on, but he had to get back to his business. And so down there in the shop where his car was (it was a blacksmith's shop too), he had made himself a pair of skis. And he took off. A snow plow was coming from Tonopah and one from Goldfield, and the cars had followed them. They would meet, and then each one'd turn around and go back. That way the cars could get from one place to the other. Evidently, we were in a part of a blizzard, and the wind would blow so hard that the hole would keep filling up. Unfortunately, in the old days, you know, they had no way of throwing snow like they do now. And so, just a big ditch is what they had.

So what he did . . . he was anxious to go, so he skied to Tonopah, and he took a lot less time than they could make going over there by car. Now that guy could ski, boy!

Did you know him? Did you meet him?

Well, yes. I saw him down there while he was making his skis. I was watching him. I was real interested in what he was doing. And I figured, boy, he's a nut going [to] Tonopah! [laughter]

Out in that snow. Tonopah is like, how far away?

Twenty-six miles. Out of Goldfield you go up pretty level until you get to Tonopah. Then you go up over that summit there.

Yes, right. Tonopah is kind of built on that.

Yes, Goldfield's right at five thousand feet, very close to that, so Tonopah and their summit there is over six thousand. So you got that hill coming. But, boy, that guy . . . oh, he made himself a pair of poles.

Poles? He made his own poles too?

Yes. Well, he got a couple of sticks, and he smoothed them up, and then got a couple of kid's wheels that they had on a car or on their little wagons or something, and he put those wheels on there, so it . . .

So it would stay, yes.

Yes, he'd streak along. Boy, he could go. And he put a real wax job on that. He ironed it in. He used an iron.

Oh. Was it an electrical iron or one of those irons that you heat on the stove?

Oh, no, you heat it on a stove. [laughter] In those days, well, my mom had an electrical iron, but I don't think until I was . . . I remember when she used to heat irons on the stove. And they had a French laundry there.

In Goldfield or in Silver Peak?

Goldfield. And they had irons down there. God, I didn't see how they could stand it. Real hot all the time, and they had all these irons on there. And they'd take the handle off and hook it onto another one, so you could have a . . .

Yes, because the handle is like a wood handle, was it? And then there's kind of a

metal cover that clamps down onto [the flat iron].

Yes. That's right, it was metal on the sides for stabilization. Well, all the way through it was metal, over the top, too. They just push a little button to get it off.

Yes, interesting. We kind of got off of the topic of sports. You mentioned a lot of riding horses and wild burros and so on. Was that kind of something that kids did for entertainment, too?

Oh, sure. [laughter] Well, most kids rode burros, because early in the life of mining, that's how they moved the ore from where they mined it out to wherever they wanted it to be—how to get it out of the tunnel. And even in the deep mines, like over in Goldfield where they'd put the burros down a shaft, and then they'd have [ore] cars down there. And the burros then would pull [ore] cars back and forth, if these were large cars and stuff like that. That didn't happen so much as it did in the tunnels. But that was before they had the power . . . trams they called them, to pull it. Even after they first got those, they still didn't want to use them, because they were afraid of gassing everybody inside. But later they found ways to correct that, I guess.

Anyway, they did use the burros, so for that reason there was a lot of burros around. They became available to the kids when they'd let them out of the mine. When the miners took out, they just turned them loose. And so some people claimed them. Sometimes the mines would sell them to kids. The one I had, I named him Beauty. He wasn't a beauty by any chance, but that's what I named him anyway.

[laughter] Yes. Was he your very own? I mean, did you buy him, or did you just claim him?

Yes, I bought him, and I can't remember who I bought him from. I only paid two dollars for him. But I cleaned a lot of yards and stuff to get that two bucks. And I thought that was the greatest burro.

Oh, yes, and the Fourth of July, you know, they'd have burro races and horse races and kid races, adult races and all that stuff, you know. That's how they made their fun, and I'd pretty near always win the speed contest and the bucking contest.

With your burro, Beauty?

With the same one! [laughter] All you got to do is to put your feet in his flanks and, boy, he'd buck. [laughter]

*How old were you when you had the burro?
Do you remember?*

Oh, God. I was just a little guy.

Grade-school age?

Oh, no, no. I was a lot younger than that. I was . . . oh, I don't know, I was probably seven or eight.

And the Fourth of July celebration was a big celebration for the town. Is that right?

Oh, you bet, boy. Well, I worked seven days a week when I first went to work. But back in those days, usually you got two days off a year. Sometimes you'd get lucky and get three. You'd have the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, and Christmas, and you didn't get paid for it either.

Yes, those were just days off without pay.

That's right. And you didn't have any sick leave either.

Or vacation time?

Yes. Yes.

You could take vacation?

Oh, we always took a vacation. Well, my dad did. Then later, in 1940, that's when they passed the wage and hour law, so then we started getting a day off once in a while. But, no, my dad always got a good vacation.

How long was it? A week?

His was a month. The people who worked at the mines, most of them only got a week. And those who worked at the mill, they got . . . let's see, I think you got one week after a year. And after about five years, I think, you got a couple of weeks. And I think that's all you ever did get.

What did your family do when your dad had vacation? Did you go on trips?

We all went with him. Oh, listen. This was really something to see. If somebody would see it now, you'd never believe it. We always had a car, back when a lot of people were still using horses. Well, my dad was in that kind of a business, you know. He was mechanically inclined, so he got the first car. We had all kinds of old cars. We had an Oakland, and we had several Franklins. Those were air cooled, you know, didn't have a radiator. And an old Studebaker. Oh, we had a lot of cars. And a Star.

Anyway, you want to remember there were eight of us kids, but we weren't all there at one time, because by the time Dorothy was born, my oldest brother was out of school.

Fayette was out of school?

Fayette was out of school, and Elwood was about out. But there was always at least six of us, and there for a while it was seven. Usually, one of them was little. Usually, there was a baby that my mom held most of

the time, and once in a while the kids'd get to hold it for a little while. And sometimes another one would sit in front and the rest of us would be in the back. And on all the fenders You know, back in those days you had fenders and running boards.

On the outside of the car?

That's right. You had a cloth top, so you didn't put anything up there, but on the back you often had what they called a trunk rack, so you could tie stuff there. So all the fenders and stuff had Then in the back seat Usually, these cars were long, and there was quite a space between the front and the back seat, so they put the grub sacks and grub boxes of stuff and then the cooking utensils and stuff in there.

In by where your feet were?

That's right. And the only oiled . . . the only paved roads I know of in the state of Nevada then—there was one through the

main street of Fallon (and that was only because the contractors lived there), and they had one on Fourth Street, just through Fourth Street itself.

Of Reno?

Of Reno, and one on Virginia Street. They didn't even have one in Las Vegas.

And so there was definitely no oiled roads in Silver Peak or between Silver Peak and anywhere else?

Oh, no. No, no, that was all dirt. We would generally go to San Francisco, because my mother's mother was there and her sister. And anyway, we liked to go down there, because we liked to go on the beach. Sometimes we'd go by Yosemite, and sometimes we'd go by Donner. And those narrow roads, you know, you'd be driving up there. If you meet a car, somebody'd have to back up to a turnout. They had turnouts here.

From Silver Peak to San Francisco, if we went right straight, it would take us at least two days. That was a minimum, two days.

Did you camp if you went two days?

Oh yes. Oh, yes, we had to camp. And we'd usually camp up on Donner. We'd try to get up to the summit, if we could, in one day, and that way we could fish and stuff, and there was a lot of real nice fish in there. That was before the days when there was all kinds of fish. Well, everybody was a



"Well, my dad was . . . mechanically inclined, so he got the first car. We had all kinds of old cars." Fayette Hill standing in front of his Lincoln Zephyr. (Photograph courtesy of Gerry Cooper.)

fisherman, more or less. And that's how you got your dinner a lot of the times, although we always had sardines and stuff like that so you could have

Canned food.

But we always had stuff to cook, so we had hot meals and stuff even as we went along.

Was it tent camping? Did you put up a tent or just sleep out under the stars?

Oh, oh, generally not. We just slept out on the I don't know, we didn't carry a tent, because that would take up room.

Yes. [laughter] So many kids and all the supplies to go, too.

And once in a while, like when we'd go over to Yosemite, we'd stay at (I think it's still there) Wolf Lodge, I think they called it. And we'd stay there, but all they had was one little cabin, and there was a stove in it and maybe a cot or two and a table. And that's all there was in it. And so my mother and father would stay in there, and any baby if we had a baby with us, and then the rest of us would sleep outside. But everybody did that, and there was always enough of us in our family so we could have a ball game or something, and that's what we'd do. My mother and my father, they played too.

Vacation sounds like it was fun for your family.

Oh, it was. And my dad was always so humorous in a lot of ways, and he enjoyed everything. He didn't drink at all. He didn't even drink coffee and tea. [laughter] He didn't smoke. And he just liked people, and you could hear him laugh all over town. [laughter] But he played everything with us.

Yes, we played ball. And so did my mother, really.

Yes, and then you had these wonderful trips every summer? Is that when you went?

Yes, when the kids were out of school.

Take a month, go to San Francisco, and come back, spend time on the beach

Yes, we went other places too, but San Francisco was always part of our destination. That way we got to go to the World's Fair and all that stuff.

I see. So that was kind of a family tradition.

Yes.

He was the superintendent of the Black Mammoth at that time?

Yes.

And so how did he arrange to be gone from . . . ?

Of the Black Mammoth Mill. Oh, the people that worked with him, they were all trained, like my cousin, Kenneth. Kenneth worked there at the mill, and then before Jimmy Morris got the trucking business, he worked there. And a fellow by the name of Smoky Baldwin; these fellows, they had worked there. Well, now after the cyanide plant started, then I don't know. Because what they would do is, they didn't retort the gold or do anything like that while he was gone. That was all held until he got back.

Because that was the risky area of dealing with gold and making sure it got to Tonopah and so on?

Yes, and there was never any danger of it ever being stolen. Except one time some guy stole, I think it was about twenty cans of silver concentrate or something from the Nivloc, and they took it to Mina and shipped it. But they got caught. Oh, they got caught when they went to have it processed at the mint, because they knew where it came from. As soon as they run their tests on it, they knew where it came from, so they knew who they were! [laughter]

[laughter] At one point you said that, when your father transported the gold to Tonopah, the insurance company wanted him to have an armed guard, and usually your mother went with him. So who was the armed guard?

It was probably my mother.

Did she have a weapon?

Oh, yes, there was a weapon there, but I'm sure if somebody wanted the gold, they'd've given it to them. But, no, there was always someone went with them. Not necessarily . . . my mother and probably some other people, too, because you're thirty-six miles away from shopping at the least. That's Goldfield. And then most people would rather shop at Tonopah, which was a little over fifty miles, and so they would go to Tonopah. My dad had to go to Tonopah for a lot of reasons, and so they would go quite often.

I see.

And so they never knew when he was going to go . . . And no one knew. Just like Gerry thought that she went up there one time and watched them pour that gold, but I think that Gerry's having a pipe dream, because he didn't want *anybody* to know, not even my *mother*. No one knew. And the guys who worked in the mill didn't even

know it until he started to do it, and then he had one of them come down and help him. But up until that, no one knew what he was doing. And so they never knew when he was going to ship it. You know, he could be going in [to town] for something else today.

Right. So he made enough trips that nobody really knew on which trip he had the gold with him.

That's right.

And he didn't advertise around town when he was ready to pour the gold.

That's right. Of course, the shifts were always changing at the mill. I suppose nowadays, with all the crooks that are around, they would . . . somebody at the mill, sometime when he went down to process this gold, they would very likely pass it on to somebody else, just pass on, and they'd do whatever they do. But it seemed like people were mostly honest in those days. It's amazing how honest they were. [laughter]

Yes, because this was happening all the time, and did your father ever get robbed?

No. The one time was in Nivloc and that was later. That was after the Black Mammoth had burned.

Were you around when the Black Mammoth burned? This is when the mill burned?

No. I was not there then when the mill burned. I wasn't there; neither was my dad.

OK. That was much later.

That was, yes. He and the people that owned the Northern Transportation, they

went into partners on a tungsten mine over out of Gabbs.

OK. So he moved away from Silver Peak.

And I went with him. I hauled the mill in and did all that stuff.

Hauled the mill in to Gabbs?

Not to Gabbs. This was up in that area, but farther north. It's up out from Mina and Luning, up in through there.

And when you say you hauled the mill in, describe . . .

All the materials to build to mill.

From where?

From wherever

Where they were purchased?

Mostly it would be from the railroad, because they'd order it from somewhere. Sometimes it would be from another mine operation or something where they'd buy a ball mill, or they'd buy something here, and they'd buy something else over there. Because it wouldn't be unusual for a mill to shut down somewhere, and then the parts would be purchased to build another mill somewhere else as the mining shifted. You know, one would run out, and another would be built. Well, just like the Cord Mill. He built that 300-ton mill, and I think Hugh Shamberger said that it cost him \$42,000 or something. And that's mighty cheap, boy. [laughter]

And so they saved by using things that already existed elsewhere.

Oh, yes, sure. Well, you know, those things were made to last. You take like a ball

mill; it's got liners, cast iron liners inside of it.

Yes, and you're measuring a couple of inches thick. Correct?

You bet. That's what goes inside of this metal framework. They don't let them wear and get up against that framework. When they start to wear, they take them out and put in new ones.

Put in a new lining?

So all the wear is on that part there. A lot of these mills would never have been built if you had to buy new materials.

In fact, I helped some people steal a mill once. Didn't even know it.

Steal a mill? How did that happen?
[laughter]

Well, in a way. There was a mill out of Silver Peak up in the Palmetto Mountains. And a fellow, I think, by the name of McNamara owned it. It was shut down because they were no longer producing, I guess. So there were some people out of Goldfield—the name was Childers—there was a family; it was three or four of them. They were building a mill over by Goldfield. Well, another kid and I, we were just young guys, and we were up there working for the cattle ranch, and we were holding this bunch of steers. And these guys had to go by there. Well, there'd been a cloud burst, and the road was washed out. They go down there and got stuck, so we went down there and tied a rope onto them with horses, and we helped get them out of the sand. And we helped them build a road there while we were watching these cattle. Gave us something to do. Turns out that later, one day we were driving some cattle up out of Lida, Jim Daniels and me, and the sheriff come over and stopped, and he was talking

to him. Anyway, he was inquiring about this, swiping this mill up there. He knew that we had cattle over there, and so I guess Daniels told him that we'd helped him. [laughter] So I told him about it. Anyway, that place was named the Midnight Milling Company. [laughter]

Appropriately. [laughter]

I don't know how they ever found out that the mill was stolen, because it was in a very remote place and hard to get to. And I had no idea it was stolen. I thought that they had bought the thing, you know.

Sure, and were just moving it, because that happened all the time.

I didn't know people did that sort of thing. [laughter]

You know, stories like that make me think of, and this is kind of out of sequence, but an important story was that your father was involved in moving the schoolhouse into Silver Peak. Can you tell that story?

Well, now this is off the cuff a little bit, but my cousin, Kenneth, he told Hugh Shamberger that my dad and Uncle Frank and various other people were involved with moving that schoolhouse. Well, I know my dad built the device for raising the power lines, so that you wouldn't get electrocuted.

So that the schoolhouse could move under them?

Right. I wasn't involved in the actual movement, but I went up to help unload it.

So you saw it come into town.

Yes. I . . . well, I heard all this excitement, and then I went up to see what's going on; I saw the schoolhouse come.



"Half the houses in Silver Peak, or more than half of them, are probably moved from Goldfield or Tonopah or Rhyolite or someplace." In this picture, Frank and Fayette Hill were using Frank's trucks to move buildings. (Photograph courtesy of Gerry Cooper.)

How did they move it?

On Jimmy Morris's truck.

A big, flatbed truck?

Yes. Although, they were accustomed to doing this. You know, you moved a lot of houses in those Half the houses in Silver Peak, or more than half of them, are probably moved from Goldfield or Tonopah or Rhyolite or someplace.

Because not everybody built their home; they would build one home in one town and then move it to the next town when they moved to another mine.

Yes, a lot cheaper to move it. Well, a fellow by the name of Pickles, that was his whole job, was moving houses. They had poles—big, long poles on them. But this schoolhouse wasn't very big.

It was a one-room schoolhouse?

Yes. So they just went up there and jacked it up. Well, it never had been let down

much, because they moved in there [in the first place] so they could get it out of town, so they'd qualify for a school.

Because there was something with the county lines and how many schools could be . . .

That's right. You had to be forty miles away or you couldn't have your own school. Otherwise, you'd have to go to Goldfield and Tonopah or wherever you wanted to go. So they took the house up there, and when they let it down, they didn't get it all the way down. But it was just a light house, and so it didn't take anything to jack it up. They just backed the truck under it and let it down on the truck and away they went. They went downtown . . .

And your dad raised the power lines, and they brought it into town?

Stanley Chiatovich sat up on the house, on top, and rang the bell all the way down to the street. [laughter] Well, you'd have to know something was going on in a little town like that. But I still think, I saw my dad drive up with my mother in a car after the thing went down. I don't think he was up there. I really don't. And I don't think my uncle was. But Kenneth was there, so he should know. But I know that Howard Haskin was there, and Roy Cleary, Stanley Chiatovich, and another one. I think one of the Shirleys was there—probably Ernie because they had a kid in school. So I'll bet they were probably getting tired of hauling the kids out of town.

Because they had to take them four miles out of town to go to school every day.

That's right. Every day, and they had to go get them.

So you saw the schoolhouse come into town with Stanley up there ringing the bell all the way down the street.

Yes.

What happened then? Do you remember?

Oh, they drove it up there and jacked it up a little bit, put some barrels under it and let it down. And then all the county commissioners got a little upset. [laughter]

Because this was supposed to be four miles out of town [to meet regulations for the distance required between schools].

Yes. So they had a hearing. And Tom Whyte was the justice of the peace. So anyway, he found everybody guilty of disturbing the peace and charged them a buck.

And the schoolhouse got to stay?

Yes, the schoolhouse stayed. I don't know why they never brought it up later again, in the next school year or something, but they never did. Well, school later on started to die down anyway after the war, and that was not too much before that.

But you went to school all the way through school in Goldfield, right?

I never went to school out there [at Silver Peak] at all.

Why did you go to Goldfield to school, do you know?

Yes, because they didn't have a school in Silver Peak along about that time. But another reason was, we didn't live in Silver Peak all that time.

And why was that? Because of the school?

Because there was not much activity out there, and my dad was in Goldfield in 1906, right after Goldfield was discovered, and my uncle would haul . . . I guess together they got a hold of a couple of old trucks, and he'd haul the materials in, and my dad was building houses in Goldfield. And so we lived there then.

Gerry was born there, and . . . oh, let's see. Heck, all my sisters were born there. Yes, it was Gerry and Mary and Virginia and Lois and Dorothy. They were all born in Goldfield. And let's see . . . Gerry, Elwood, and Fayette. Gerry and I went clear through high school there.

Grade school clear through high school.

That's right.

But when you were about four years old, your family moved to Silver Peak. Is that right?

Yes.

Was there a time that your father worked in Silver Peak, and your family lived in Goldfield?

Oh, sure.

And then did he come back and forth, or did the family go to Silver Peak to meet him on weekends? How did you work that out?

Well, both ways. Let's see, he went out there when they were building the mill, and that was probably around 1930, I suppose, in there, because the banks closed, I don't know when . . . 1930?

Shortly . . . yes, 1929 and 1930 right in there?

Right around that time. Not too long after 1929. So he was out there building that

mill then. From that time on he must have been out there. He worked out there.

But your family stayed in Goldfield, you and your mom?

We had a house in . . . we had a place in Goldfield, yes. We had a house there [in Silver Peak], so sometimes we'd go out there on weekends and, sometimes he would come into Goldfield on weekends. Or it may not be a weekend. It might be a weekday, might have been something doing, like when we got older and we were playing organized ball and stuff like that in the schools, if we had something doing during the weekend, of course, we couldn't go. And we didn't go all the time anyway, because he didn't have the time to come after us. A lot of times, back then, a weekend didn't really mean much except to school or a bank. [laughter]

Yes, because everybody was working seven days a week.

That's right.

Yes, so your family just got together as best they could in between times.

That's right.

OK. When you were in Goldfield, you said something about boxing. Were there some things for kids to do? Was that one of the sports?

Yes. Sure. The Elks would have a . . . I don't know what they'd have, meetings or something, so they'd get kids to come up there and box. They'd give us two dollars apiece or something. We'd only fight two or three rounds. And the schools would usually have kind of a carnival-type thing. They'd go in there, and people would put on acts and stuff like that, and they'd also have boxing. A

lot of times we'd box with local people and sometimes with people from Tonopah or somebody who'd want to come over. So they'd have kids do that. No one ever got hurt, even though you got a bloody nose once in a while. [laughter]

But that was one of the things that you did after school?

Yes.

There was one other thing that you mentioned from the Silver Peak days which was the sledding. Would you describe that?

You know, it's a wonder somebody didn't lose a leg or something, because we even took galvanized iron . . . you know, galvanized iron comes in sheets about three feet wide and eight feet long or something like that, I suppose. And we would turn it up a little bit on the end, so it wouldn't catch in the snow, and put a cable through there and tie it on behind Nobby Pergrossi's car, and he'd tow us around town, and we'd ride on that sucker. Well, you know, if a guy were to fall off in the front, with the weight of the back people sitting on there, that could have sawed his leg off. And that's why we later went to the ladder, because people who had better sense kept hollering at us until we finally quit using the galvanized iron. [laughter]

And then how did you do a ladder?

Oh, we didn't do much for a ladder. All we'd do is we'd take a ladder and . . . the front runners . . . well, usually there's a step thing right at the very top . . . at the top and at the bottom. Well, of course, it may not be—clear at the bottom, so in that case you just turn it around, and you saw that on a forty-five degree angle, so you had that much of a slope to But a lot of times

that front end would stick into the snow. Where the roadway was, we tried to stay on the roadway because that way the snow was packed, but sometimes when he'd turn around or something, then it'd get into a snow bank, and it'd throw all that snow all over us! [laughter]

So the ladder acted as your runners for your sled, and then did you put something on top of it?

And that was something for us to sit on. Well, no, we'd just sit on there.

You just sat on the ladder?

Oh, yes. If we got into deeper snow . . . he tried to stay on the road, but a lot of times the roads would be kind of like ruts, so if you come down that middle, boy, you had snow coming up on the backside of you; you got pretty cold. [laughter] Well, what we'd usually do though, is put a blanket or something down there to try to keep some of it off you. You had to improvise. We didn't have anything else. [laughter]

Sounds like you had creative minds—in making your own skis and creating sleds.

Well, another thing we used to like to do (I don't know why; it was such a lot of work), we'd take old truck tires and stuff, take them up to the top of the hill, and then just roll them down and see how far they'd go. Boy, it sure didn't take much to make you happy in those days. [laughter]

You've mentioned some people, and I'd like to go back a little bit. Jimmy Morris and his trucks were well-known around Silver Peak. You worked for him for a while, right? And tell me what your job was and what his business was.

Well, he started . . . he was working in the mill for my dad, and he worked there for quite a while. And then, when the mill started going pretty good, they had some old truck that was hauling the ore there for them. But this wasn't satisfactory, so Jimmy Morris, he went and saw Vollmar to see if he could get a contract to do that. I think the company was doing it for themselves, and so he said, "Yes, we don't want to fool with it." So Jimmy managed to get credit with Parker over at Goldfield, and he started out with buying a Ford dump truck, and he started to haul in more with that Ford dump truck. Well, then later, by innovative means, they managed to raise their tonnage more and more, and he couldn't keep up with one truck, and so he got two. And then later, when they had that other mill and he knew they were going to get the mill, then by that time he had financing, and so he bought some big trucks. At first they were just bobtail. That is . . . you know what bobtail is?

No.

A bobtail truck is one that doesn't have a trailer. The GMC was like a T95 they called it in those days, and it was just a big, heavy-duty truck. Great big engine. Powerful. And it had six wheels—duals on the back. It drove on all four back wheels. And that would haul about, oh, ten or twelve tons. Well, then later as it took more and the tonnage kept increasing, then he put semi-trailers on there. Then he could haul around twenty tons.

I don't know, he was kind of a hero worship [of mine], I guess, when I was younger.

Why?

Well, for one reason, he came from Colorado, and he'd been on a ranch, and I was quite taken with cowboys in those days.

And when I was just a young guy, I worked for him. Even when I was just a kid, he let me use his shop, and while I was going to high school, when I'd come out to Silver Peak, I'd go around and get jobs from people—greasing their cars and washing them, polishing them and stuff like that. And I could use his shop and stuff to do all that. Then when I got out of school, then I started driving for him. I was only . . . I was about eighteen when I went to work for him.

So you drove truck back and forth from the mines down to the mill in Silver Peak?

Yes. Well, I also, sometimes would make a trip to the smelter over at McGill. And we hauled oil up to Northumberland. Now, he had other jobs besides that right there.

Oh, I see.

And what he'd do is, he'd use the same trucks, but by this time he had other big trucks. And then later, of course, he went to diesels, but then it was gas. Like when he took oil to Northumberland, he had another trailer that had an oil tanker on it.

What was one of the main challenges of going back and forth to the mines?

Keep from driving off the cliff and getting killed. [laughter]

Because it's steep, or because it's so narrow?

Both.

A very steep road.

Oh, yes. But then it wasn't all that bad; you got used to it. But you know, like you take that T95, down there . . . I don't know if that road is still . . . Is there any pavement on that road yet?



"I was about eighteen when I went to work for [Jimmy Morris]. . . [One of the main challenges was to] keep from driving off the cliff and getting killed." Leon Hill loading ore into Jimmy Morris's truck at the Mary Mine. (Photograph courtesy of Leon Hill.)

Up to the mine?

Yes.

No. It's all gravel.

Well, back up there, right after you leave where the bin is, where they load You know, there's pictures of that; I showed you where you load there.

Right.

Well, right after you leave that, about a hundred yards or so down the road, or maybe a little longer (to me that seems like

that now, but it may be a little longer), there's a turn there where you have to turn around a hill. Well, these tires, they were very expensive. In order to avoid breaking them with these rocks on the side of the hill, when you come down there with that, you had to drive way out on that edge. In fact, that truck was so rigid that you could put your right front wheel over the edge there, and it would still hold upright. And then you'd pull around the corner, and that's the way you could miss hitting those rocks with that tire back there.

You were talking about how you drove down from the mine with a load of ore in the truck, and you actually drove around that first corner with the right front tire off of the road. Is that right?

Yes, well, a little ways off. Not far. But the truck was so rigid, the framework and stuff, so much weight behind, that you didn't fall off the hill. [laughter]

I see. And that was done to help preserve the tires?

Yes. That was to keep the tires off of the rocks along the walls there. And I always wondered why they didn't use a little bit of dynamite and knock some more of that hill off so you didn't have to do that, because I wasn't always all that anxious to do it, especially if there was snow on the ground. But I didn't want to break a tire either.

And that hill was steep. I know one time down there on what they call a steep pitch In fact, one picture I have shows the trucks. We were right up the top of that, and we were either taking off chains or putting them on or something. And there was a Northern Transportation truck ahead of me hauling a load of supplies up to the hill. I was coming up the hill empty, and they were loaded. I was waiting for him down below, and he got about two-thirds the

way up the hill, and he couldn't make it. And he stopped. And then the driver was afraid to try to back down. He couldn't back down anyway, because this was a You come right around the corner and go up that steep hill, if you know which one it is. It's real steep.

Right.

And so they had to send up for a Cat to come down and pull him up the hill. And so Vollmar come up there after a while. I guess the word got down to him. There were a lot of cars down there, and he come up, and he pulled up in a thing, and he told me, he said, "Well, I got to get around you."

I said, "I can't get out there. Everybody's behind me."

And he said, "Well, pull up a ways." He didn't want to walk all the way up that hill to talk to the driver. So I pulled up behind that truck. And he'd put a couple of rocks behind the back wheels, the driver of the Northern truck. He had his brakes on, and he put rocks behind it, because he was afraid it would roll back anyway. And so Vollmar went up and talked to him and said whatever he wanted. They had the Cat coming down anyway, and about that time the Cat came down.

From above?

Yes, to hook onto him. But they weren't hooked on to him yet. That driver went up, and I could hear the brakes starting to release; I could hear the air leaking. And I said, "Don't let that brake go till you get hooked up!" And that was too late. The sucker, he took the brakes off, and it just went right over the rocks and come at me. And I hollered to Vollmar, "Get out of there!" so I could back down. He didn't get far enough ahead, so I stopped then, and I put on all my brakes, because I figured otherwise we're going to wreck everybody,

because all these cars were at the bottom of the hill and me too. And so he ran into me and mashed up the whole front end of the truck. Oh, it was an awful mess. But that hill was steep. And you can just *imagine* going up there in the wintertime when there was snow on the ground.

Yes. So it wasn't unusual to have to stop and chain up going up or down?

Yes. Of course, there was no snow that day. When he did that, that was perfectly dry.

But he just couldn't make it up. It was too heavy, overloaded.

It just wouldn't pull it. Well, I don't know why it wouldn't. Of course, our trucks, they were made for that. They were low-gearred and powerful engines. But you could imagine coming down a lot of times. You come down there with snow on the ground, even with chains and particularly after they had run over it, in a while it starts getting hard and slick, and you'd kind of toboggan down that hill, you know. [laughter] You'd go a ways, and then it'll catch on a . . . link a little bit and slow it up a little, and then you'd go again. [laughter]

Pretty exciting job, trying to [laughter]

Yes, it was. But I was just a kid. You know, I never thought about that.

Because you started working for him right out of high school. And then did you continue working for him after you got married?

Yes, for a while. And I don't know why I quit. I probably thought I had a reason. Probably I wanted to go play basketball or something. [laughter]

Something like that. Tell me a little bit about Fred Vollmar. You've mentioned him. He's the one who got you started digging that water ditch, and he was here on the hill. So he was around town. You must have known him.

Oh, yes.

What do you remember of him?

Everyone knew him. You'd never know that he was the president of that company, and, in fact, he got all the money to get the thing going and all that. He was a real promoter. And he liked to do things. We used to go out and play touch football.

And he liked to play?

Yes, he'd go out and play with us. He always grumbled because, you know, he was a big, heavy guy. And we were, you know, slender and young, and we could run like hell, and he couldn't catch us, but we could catch him. [laughter] But, yes, he was involved in everything with everybody. And like when they'd have these celebrations and stuff, he was always out there. The city never had any money. Well, they didn't have a city; they just had people living around there. And so, they'd have foot races and stuff, and he'd give two dollars to somebody or five dollars to somebody for something, you know, for whoever won something. He was a real good sport, real good guy.

Another thing, he worried about his people. Of course, back in those days the minimum wage at the Black Mammoth was five dollars. That was for a day. And then, of course, overtime, that didn't mean anything. You might get paid for it; you might not. But if you did, you just got regular . . .

Straight pay?

. . . salary—regular pay, whatever it was. Forty-two and a half cents an hour or whatever it was. [laughter] Well, it would be more than that, wouldn't it? But I think it was sixty-two and a half an hour. I think that's what it was, if I'm not mistaken.

Yes, not much more than that.

Yes. But things were cheap.

But he was concerned about his workers?

Oh, yes.

How did he show that?

Oh, in a lot of ways. Well, like when Cord came in there, the first thing he wanted to do was to reduce the wages, but he [Vollmar] had it tied up in the contract where he couldn't do it.

Oh, Cord wanted to reduce the wages?

Yes. You know, Cord had a real bad reputation.

In town?

Not there, but back East. He'd made a lot of money back East in the steel mills, and he was always afraid somebody was going to kill him.

Oh, really?

Like if he'd eat out in a restaurant, he'd go in there, and he'd always have somebody else taste his food before he'd eat it. And he'd have these people with him, you know, sitting there with him, and he'd draw diagrams and stuff on the tablecloth with ink and things of that sort, you know. And we were a poor town. [laughter]

Couldn't afford tablecloths for his drawings?

That's right. And another thing, one time (I'll always remember this) they come in on an airplane, and . . .

Cord did?

Cord did. Well, whenever he'd come in, he came by plane. It was a Lockheed, and it was a big plane. And he'd give Vollmar a ride or somebody like that, but they're about the only ones that ever got a ride.

And were airplanes rare in Silver Peak?

Oh, yes, you bet. Especially something like that Lockheed. With the people that were close to him, like a Vollmar and Sweet and people like that, he gave them Cord automobiles for Christmas.

Oh, really?

Yes! [laughter] And that just got Vollmar in trouble because when he'd go down to L.A., he'd speed down the highway there. You know, the highway patrol people couldn't catch him. [laughter] And in those days they didn't have radios in your car so you could call ahead, so they'd have to wait until they get to a telephone. By that time, he was through the town they telephoned! [laughter]

Now what you're describing is a real difference. It sounds like everyone in town pretty much liked Fred Vollmar, but that Cord kept himself aloof from people in town. Is that accurate?

Well, that's basically true. Cord really didn't spend a great deal of time there. He had a general manager named Sweet, and his chief geologist was Prescott, and Prescott had a lease.

Which is where you get the Prescott lease on the E.L. Cord Mill.

That's right. And so Cord, he milled . . . Actually, I think the Prescott lease was a Cord lease. Anyway, I think that he just got it for him. And then Cord had another lease later. Well later, Cord wound up with the whole darn place just before everything was shut down. But Mr. Sweet was his general manager, and he ran the day-to-day operations.

And he lived in town?

He lived in town, yes. Yes, he built a house right over near Fred Vollmar's.

Yes, and Fred lived in town. So those two were really part of the town.

Sure. But Sweet, of course, was nothing like Vollmar. He was the general manager, and you knew it. He let you know . . . Well, he was civil, you know, but he didn't go out of his way to be friendly and stuff like Vollmar.

Vollmar liked to ride horses, too. Of course, he had Indian blood in him, probably. When he was younger, I think, he was quite a rider, but then the good life got him, and he got fat. [laughter]

He was too heavy?

He was down at Reno one time, and they were having some kind of parade. They had this parade horse, so he got this parade horse. And he bought him because he was big, but he shook Vollmar to pieces. That doggone horse, he was *forever* dancing and prancing and throwing his head! He'd get foam in his mouth and throw foam in your face, and I rode him a couple of times, but I didn't like to ride him. But anyway, you know, Vollmar was into everything. And besides that he was a . . . oh, a terrible

gambler, too. Well, I don't know if terrible, but he'd bet on horse races and stuff like that. He'd call down and make bets . . .

From Silver Peak he'd called down?

Yes.

Did he have a phone?

Oh, yes. He's the only one who had a telephone.

Well, yes, your dad went to the power station.

He and the power company, they had telephones. Well, he didn't even have one at first, just the power company. But then later, after he built that new house, he ran the line out there. He had it run into his house.

So he'd call in his bets, and everybody knew about his gambling, evidently.

Oh, yes.

Did he talk to you about gambling?

No. Oh, he'd bet on anything, which is why he was giving money for foot races and things at the Fourth of July. He'd do anything like that, you know. And everyone liked him, I think. But you know, as I told you before, I think the people here were real independent. Now, they liked him, but they didn't want him telling them what to do.

Yes, you mentioned the voting.

The voting. Mr. Fulton, at least I think, he would have carried Silver Peak in a walk, because they really liked his son who worked with us up at the mill. And I'm sure that they would have voted for him, but

when they put out this ballot telling everybody how to vote . . .

That did it.

. . . he didn't get any votes hardly.
[laughter]

Was there ever any attempt to have unions there that you recall?

Not to my knowledge. Well, we probably didn't have enough to interest a union, although they had them at Goldfield, but Goldfield was a big operation.

Bigger than Silver Peak?

Oh, yes. They were booming. Oh, God, there was thirty thousand people in Goldfield.

Yes, but you mentioned something about Sweet's attitude, you know, that everybody knew he was in charge of Cord's Mill. Your dad was a superintendent. What impact did that have on you? Did people treat you differently? Did you ever feel . . . ?

I don't think so. If they did, it was probably because they were bitter, and they were taking it out on me. [laughter] No, I don't think so. I don't think it made any difference at all.

Not really?

Well, you know, that didn't make a lot of difference to people. Like Stanley Chiatovich and Ernie Shirley, they were both big mine bosses. And Bill Graham's brother. People liked them, and they respected them and did what they were told. Either that or they quit. But, you know, they were just treated like somebody else that was just fortunate enough to get the job that they liked to have.
[laughter]

Yes. So you didn't experience any harassment or anything. Like when the community came out to play ball, for example, there just wasn't any distinction about the superintendent's son or anything like that? You didn't ever feel that?

No. I doubt if . . . probably, half of them didn't even know it. Well, I don't know. People from out of town . . . well, probably from Tonopah or Goldfield, they probably knew; I'm sure they did. But I didn't really think a lot about it. I just thought—it's just one of these things. Well, he had always been in that kind of a position, you know. And all through the Depression, all through those lean years, we didn't even know about it. In fact, you hardly knew about it in the mining areas.

Because the Depression wasn't felt in the mining areas? As long as the mining was good, the rest of the economy could be quite different.

Well, in fact, it did a lot better during the Depression. That's probably the reason why the mines and things started up again, because everything else was bad. Boy, then suddenly there's a demand for gold, because that's the only thing that they could get any money out of. [laughter] That's probably it.

It sounds like in terms of attitudes about people who were the bosses in town, if they were involved in the town, then there wasn't a problem. If they kept themselves separate from the town, like Sweet did or Cord (who kind of came and went, was more of an investor), then people would remark on their attitude. Am I reading that right? Am I hearing that right? It's like your dad was very much involved in the town.

Yes.

He'd be out playing ball and taking care of his family, and . . .

Sure. And if somebody had something that was broken, they wouldn't hesitate to take it to my dad and ask him if he'd fix it. And he always fixed it. There was never a charge or anything like that. Well, you never charged anybody . . .

For friends, yes.

I know my wife's folks had a washing machine. Around Silver Peak, you know, there's a lot of dirt blowing, seeing as how there wasn't a lot of grass and stuff like that to hold it down. And she had a washing machine outside. It was one of these old type where you had an agitator, and then you had a wringer on the top.

Was it a crank?

Not the wringer. No, it was electric. Electric. That was in the 1930s, late 1930s. And anyway, the pulley, it worked clear through the pulley, because they were made out of pot metal, you know, just pot metal. So I went by there, and her dad said, "I can't get this pulley. Do you think your dad could weld this?"

And I said, "I think it's pot metal, and pot metal you can't weld. If you put heat on it, it'll explode!"

I took it up to Dad anyway, and he says, "No, I can't weld that," but he said, "I'll make you one." So he went down to the dump and found an old piece of iron and stuck it in a lathe and made one. I took it down to him. He wouldn't believe that they hadn't bought that somewhere.

He didn't believe that your dad had made it; it was so perfect.

But that's the sort of thing that people did. And it wasn't only my dad. It was other people, too, you know.

So really, part of how people were judged in town was whether they were helpful to each other. That was an important thing, because everybody needed to rely on each other in a small town like that.

Well, probably, but some of the people weren't helpful, but they were well accepted, because maybe there was nothing, really, that they wanted to do. [laughter] But I know when we built our house, we didn't spend one penny for labor. Not a penny!

And this is when you and Wilma got married, right?

That's right.

Because I wanted to hear the story about how your house got built.

Well, we just picked out a spot where we thought we'd like to live. [laughter] You didn't buy the property; you just moved on it. And so one place we picked, we went up there and measured it off and marked it off. In the meantime, some guy comes along and fenced it! [laughter] So he beat me to it, so we went down across the road, and we picked out a place we wanted, and Jimmy Morris loaned me a truck, and we went over to Fallon. And we'd already figured out what we wanted and how much we needed of it. And so we bought the lumber and roofing and all that stuff and took it over and unloaded it over there.

Do you remember how much all of that cost?

Yes, that cost us just \$400.



"But I know when we built our house, we didn't spend one penny for labor. Not a penny. . . [W]e just picked out a spot where we thought we'd like to live." This is the first house that Leon and his wife, Wilma, lived in at Silver Peak. Parked in front of the house is Nobby Pergrossi's car. (Photograph courtesy of Leon Hill.)

Four hundred dollars for the lumber, the roofing, nails, everything that you needed?

That didn't include anything, of course, going inside the house. That was just the framework. And that was only the shell, the outside. That wasn't even finished inside.

No walls or anything inside.

No. That is, no finished walls. And so we went out there, and we laid a foundation and measured it all off and stuff like that. People would come along and see us; they'd stop and help us. Pretty soon we had that [done]. Believe it or not we had hardwood floors, and this one guy was real good at that. He put those hardwood floors in. Boy, that was neat. And we got the floors in. Got the thing all put up, and it didn't take hardly any time. Somebody was good at electricity, and they did all the wiring. And the local power company come up and hooked us up to the power They didn't even charge us anything for hooking it up. Of course, then we had to pay

You had a monthly bill but no hook-up charge?

A monthly bill, but it didn't amount to anything.

Do you remember what a monthly bill would have been for your power?

For power. That was about the only bill we had—around two bucks, probably.

Two dollars a month then.

Well, it wouldn't be very much, or we wouldn't have had it. [laughter]

Because you didn't have a lot of money then? You were driving trucks.

Yes, well, of course, I earned more money than most, because I got paid by the hour. See I might work a lot of hours, and so

Which was different than in the mine where you got five dollars a day.

Most out at the mine would average about \$150 a month, where I was usually making around three hundred or so. And I was spending every penny of it, too.

Even after you were married?

No. [laughter]

That changed, right?

Well, at first we did that quite a bit, but not long after. Well, of course, what we were doing probably was catching up on my bills.

From when you were single?

When you're single, yes. Because when you're single, one of the things people did when they didn't have anything else to do is they would go down to the bar. And everybody charged. Or you'd go to the soda fountain and charge, and half the time they knew they gave something to somebody, but they didn't know who, so they charged it to someone. And so I was the someone that got charged quite a bit, I think. [laughter]

Anyway, to get back to the house, though, we didn't spend anything to build that house on the outside. And then, of course, we had to have a stove.

Cooking stove?

A heating stove and a cooking stove. And so we went over to Tonopah, and there was a fellow named Cox. And we bought these stoves from him, and I think we probably paid about ten dollars down and five dollars

a month or something. But they weren't very expensive in those days. Or maybe we went to Reno and got something from Montgomery Ward's or somebody. I don't remember. But I know we bought everything on time, and we didn't pay very much for it.

It was all built, and I think we moved in about October. And my birthday's in November. And my birthday, everybody brought us a piece of plywood to finish the inside of the house.

Oh, to put the walls on.

Yes, we put insulation up as we'd go along and then put up the plywood and finished up the house. Then later we bought carpets and things like that as we could. But everything was done on time.

We had a well for water, but it was on a pump so we could water our lawn. We had a lawn.

You had grass?

Yes. And you know, an interesting thing. We got some plants (and I don't remember where we got them), but we didn't know anything, see, to prepare the land like If we knew anything about gardening, then probably nothing would have ever worked, but we planted these trees. Evidently, Mrs. Sweet had a gardener, and they planted some things for her, and they were having an awful time with it. They hauled in all this topsoil and stuff, and we didn't do anything. All we did was dig a hole in that gravel and dirt and throw a couple of shovels full of manure in there and put the tree in and buried it and started watering it, and that's all we did!

And they lived?

And they lived, and they did real well. They were thriving. Mrs. Sweet would come

down there, and she'd sit across the road, and she'd stare at those. And she wanted to know what we did. And she wouldn't believe that we wouldn't do anything to them, and they did so well.

That you didn't bring in topsoil?

And all of that topsoil and stuff didn't do a thing for them. [laughter]

Yes, because I've driven through Silver Peak now, and I don't know that anybody has a lawn now. I don't recall any green grass there. There are plenty of trees.

Yes.

People have planted trees, but I think they have given up on grass.

Probably. Well, yes, that's We had some grass, and Roy Cleary had grass, and Vollmar had a little grass, and they're the only ones that I know of.

The name Cleary, you've mentioned Roy, and last time you talked about, I think, Ed.

Ed and Jim.

And when I was in Silver Peak I saw the gravestones for the Cleary's. They were adults when you were there? Same age, older, or younger?

No, they were older than I was.

And what did they do in the town?

They all worked in the mines. Ed had an eye put out in the mine somewhere.

How did that happen? Do you know?

I don't know how it happened. I think it was some kind of a premature blast. You

know when they are drilling these rounds

Right.

. . . and like, say, you put in ten holes? Well, then you'll stay close enough so you can hear them blast, and then you count them. And if you don't have ten, then you know that one of them didn't go off, so when you go back to shovel that out, to clean that out, you want to be careful. You don't want to be picking or something around in there, because if you happen to hit that cap, it might go off. And I think that's what happened to Ed. I'm not sure of that, but I believe that's what happened to him. And that's how he had a rock hit him in the eye, and he got his eye put out. But they were all in the mining business one way or another.

Brothers? They were all brothers, and they had families?

Yes, they grew up there.

Did they? In that area?

I don't believe Jim was ever married. Ed was married, and Roy was married, but I don't believe Jim ever was.

OK. It was just a name that I had not heard before, and when I went to the cemetery and saw the Cleary name there, I was wondering what part they played in there.

And Roy was mixed up in moving that schoolhouse, too.

Yes, right. [laughter] He was involved in that.

Ed was a real good rifle shot—that son-of-a-buck could sure shoot. You know, one time We used to hunt ducks out of season, geese and everything else. And we

didn't think there was anything wrong with it. The game warden was Carl Reek, and he lived over in Blair Junction. One time Ed was down hunting, and he'd shot a bunch of ducks. He saw this car coming, and he recognized Carl Reek's car. So he throws his ducks in the back of his car, drove around the hill and came back, and Carl Reek was down there by the lake then, because he'd heard shooting, I guess, and wondered who was doing the shooting. Ed Cleary stopped and said, "Hi, Carl, how are you doing?"

Carl says, "I'm fine." He said, "Do you know who it is who's shooting all these ducks around here?"

And Ed says, "Well, I think it's some of those guys from town who come out here and do that." [laughter] Anyway, he made him deputy game warden! [laughter]

And he was the one who was doing all the shooting! [laughter]

He was the one always shooting ducks! But we used to shoot them, too. And Hooch Holt and Harvey Humphrey used to bring us kid's shells—shotgun shells—to get ducks for them. And we'd shoot these ducks, and they'd take them to Tonopah and give them to people who couldn't afford meat. We used to always also shoot rabbits. We'd go over by where I used to punch cows. There's a lot of rabbits in the hayfield over there. And you'd go there; we'd drive around there, and we'd get eighty, a hundred rabbits and take them to Goldfield. They were dying to get them.

And it was for families that couldn't afford meat from the store?

Yes. Yes, but that's why Hooch Holt and Harvey Humphrey brought that in. Carl Reek knew we were doing it, and he just overlooked it, I think. Carl Reek was interesting. This is off the subject. Carl Reek was an interesting old guy. When we would have to have a tooth pulled He had the

service station there at Blair Junction. They have one now, a big one, but that wasn't there at that time.

What you were describing is what's now Coalddale Junction, right?

They had candy and cigarettes and beer and stuff that they sold, too. For every ten-cent piece that somebody'd give, his wife would save. And she bought a new Ford that way. But I learned all this because every time someone from Silver Peak had to have a dentist, they couldn't get it there. So you go to Hawthorne, and this dentist's name was Van Valin. I remember that. And he never filled a tooth or anything. He pulled them.

If there was a problem, it got pulled.

That's right. If you went in there with a toothache, he yanked it out. The pain medication they'd give you [was to] tell you, "Go across the street and have a shot of whiskey." And that's what you did. And so then you went down the road, and by the time you got to Carl Reek's, the feeling was coming back into your jaw then, and it'd start getting sore. Carl says, "I don't like this way." He says, "Back in the old days, you used to go to a dentist, he said, 'Which tooth is it?' You showed him, and he reached in, jerked it out for fifty cents." He said, "It hurt like heck when he pulled it, but it was fine tomorrow. Now they charge you five bucks, and it doesn't hurt when they pull it, but it hurts for the next two weeks." [laughter]

[laughter] And that was how you got dental work done.

That's how we got dental work done there. And we didn't have a doctor there. We did later . . .

In Silver Peak?

Yes, but not at first. That was after it started booming, and Vollmar managed to get a doctor brought in.

Was it a company doctor?

No, no. He was a private doctor. Well, I think he got help through Dr. Craig over at Tonopah. He did all the surgery and stuff.

I see. But he was more a family doctor in Silver Peak?

Yes. And then at Goldfield was Dr. Sylvain. He was younger. Whenever Vollmar would get a sore throat or something, he'd call Dr. Sylvain. Dr. Sylvain would go out there and tell him to gargle with salt water or something. [laughter] And Sylvain said, "Well, if he wants to pay me fifty bucks to make this trip, it's fine with me."

You mean that the doctors all made house calls?

Oh, yes. Everybody did in those days, yes.

Did they have an office also, the doctor that moved there?

Well, they had different . . . a couple of two or three different doctors at different times.

But that was later? That wasn't when you were a child.

No, that's when I was older. Gerry would remember their names, but I don't.

You mentioned one thing that I wanted to talk about, and that is radio and TV. You mentioned no radios in the cars and some things like that. Where did you have . . . ?

Oh, yes, there were radios in a lot of the cars. And you had radios in your house. Oh, of course, this is way before TV. Well, it was way before TV in our part of the country anyway. Radio, too. You couldn't get any reception in the daytime at all. And at night you could get the strong stations like KCL and some of these out of the big power stations, like those out of Salt Lake and San Francisco and Los Angeles.

That was about all you could get.

Yes.

And it was just at night.

Yes.

Could you remember the first radio that your family had?

The first radio I remember was one that they had ear things on.

Oh, like earphones?

Yes.

Oh. Would it have been crystal set?

Yes. And you got a lot of squeaking and squawking. Now, like down in San Francisco, it worked pretty good, but it didn't work very good around here. And then later, I remember, at Christmastime my brother was working someplace, and he bought a Philco, one of those old . . .

It would sit on a table?

It'd sit right there.

You're measuring about maybe a foot or three feet high up above a tabletop?

Yes. And it'd sit on the table; it was rounded at the top like that. Yes, and we got reception at night there, too. Then later on, when we got radio stations in Fallon and those places, then you could start picking up a little bit during the daytime sometimes. They say that one of the reasons it was so bad there was because there was so much mineral in that area, that it interfered with the radio waves or something. That was the story we had anyway.

I remember I started to take a radio course one time. It was a correspondence thing. And they'd send me in this stuff, and you'd have to study it and take lessons, and they'd give you a test by mail and stuff like that.

To be able to broadcast or to what? To build . . .

No. Mostly to repair radios.

Repair radios. OK. Did you ever do that?

No. Well, only my own, and I don't know if I helped them or hurt them. [laughter]

[laughter] *Hard to know whether that worked or not.*

I still have a radio that I got when I was first married. Just shortly after that, they got it for my wife so we'd have a radio to listen to once in a while.

Yes. What year did you get married?

1937. But we got our first television when we were over in Hawthorne, and that would have been . . . oh, heck. That would have been probably about 1950, I would suppose. Right around there.

Yes, pretty early.

Well, it was after I got out of the service. Let's see . . . and then I was in Yerington for a couple of years. Anyway, they had a UHF system there and a translator, and evidently it has to be on a line. See, they put this up on a high mountain, so they pick it up from Reno or wherever they pick it up, and then they translate it. That way they shipped it down to other people or other areas. But they have to be in some kind of a line with it, or you can't very well get it. And so some people in town could get a fair reception, and some people couldn't get hardly any at all. And when we got our television set, we got one that had automatic tuning on it, and we only had two stations, I think. And it was terrible. It was all full of snow.

[laughter] All fuzzy. When you got radio, did that change how you spent your free time?

No.

No? Because you didn't get very good reception and only at night?

Well, at night you'd get like "Fibber McGee and Molly," and things like that, that people listened to, but if they had something else to do, they didn't let that interfere with them. They weren't, you know, sold on radio like they are now on television.

When you got TV did that change your life? Did you start to see a change then?

No. Well, when we first got it, it wasn't worth a darn anyhow. Well, it doesn't change my life right now. The only thing—my wife used to watch it a lot, but it didn't change her life any. If she happened to be home when something came on she liked, she would view it. Of course, later then, if she had something she wanted to see, we'd tape it. But I don't even turn it on until the news comes on in the evening. *[laughter]*

Speaking of news, where did you get your news? If radio was mostly available at night, did you have newspapers?

Yes, well, we didn't get a lot of news anyway, but we had a Goldfield paper and a Tonopah paper. And the Goldfield paper you got once a week and . . . yes, that was a weekly. And Tonopah, you had to go to Tonopah and get it. But at night we could get the news, see.

OK. On the radio?

On the radio. We'd get KSL, and I can't remember what the other stations [were]. So anyway, it was Salt Lake City, and it was a real good station.

Strong signal?

More strong. And San Francisco and L.A. both had pretty good stations, so at night you could get those.

And you could get national news that way?

Yes, that's where you got the national news.

And you could get state and local news from the Goldfield newspaper, and then Silver Peak news, I'm assuming, was word of mouth.

Yes. You know, I think maybe that's one of the reasons why we didn't know the bad things that happened in the world, is because nobody ever told us! *[laughter]*

You didn't have to hear it every day.

That's right. Maybe that's good.

Yes, maybe it is. We certainly seem to be overwhelmed with bad news now.

Yes.

One of the other stories that you had mentioned to me is that you saw the Max Baer-Ed Murphy fight, which is a famous fight for Silver Peak.

Yes.

Would you describe that to me? How old would you have been when you saw that fight?

It was 1938 or 1939; I would have been twenty-one or twenty-two, something like that. I was married then, and Wilma and I had a seat right in the front row, and it was an interesting fight. A lot of fun. Everybody in town went. And some of the people from Tonopah and Goldfield come out to watch. Of course, Tonopah—because Ed Murphy was a Tonopah boy.

And Max Baer was from where?

I think he started over in . . . he was a world famous fighter. He was a world champ once, and then he got to playing around, and he lost it. But he came from the Stockton area—Stockton, Sacramento, up in through there, and that's where he used to fight. In fact, he used to get to the bar there, and he'd make bets that they'd bring a mule in or a bull, and he'd make a bet he could knock him down with one blow, and he did. He won a lot of bets that way they say. But anyway, he was a powerful hitter, and he agreed to come and fight for a thousand bucks.

Well, they had some preliminary fights, too. And one of them was Don Tomany, who was later sheriff of Nye County. He died not long ago, too. I don't remember who the other young fellow was, but they started a fight, and Don Tomany, he had an odd fighting stance. He'd throw his whole weight across his body to the right to hit somebody, and it took a lot of his energy. And, of

course, he smoked and did all those things he shouldn't, so he didn't have much wind. He was getting pooped. I think they fought four rounds. But the first couple of rounds, he beat the heck out of this guy. And so the guy wanted to quit. And Freddy Fields was referee, and he used to be a champion, too. In fact, he's the one who organized the fight.

The Baer-Murphy fight, he organized it?

Yes. At that time, he was a roulette dealer up at Shirley's Bar. But anyway, this other kid wanted to quit. He wouldn't let him. He said, "No. I got you. Come here. These people want to have a show, and you're going to give them a show. You're not hurt." So he practically forced him to keep fighting. By this time, Tomany was out of gas. [laughter] And so for two rounds that other fellow beat the heck out of him.

Yes, this was one of the preliminary fights.

That was the preliminary fight, and I just wanted to tell you how the thinking goes here. Now, actually, this other guy won the fight, but they called it a draw and, boy, there was a lot of rumpus about that, but then, like he told them, he said, "You know, he wanted to quit, but I wouldn't let him. So I figured it's only fair. Tomany would have been the winner, but I wouldn't let him be the winner, so he shouldn't have to be the loser." Anyway, that's their thinking.

Yes, sportsmanship?

But that other fight . . . They went along sparring each other, and that's what they were going to do—Baer was going to take it easy with him. And I really think that Murphy got the idea that he might be able to lick Baer, so he smacked him one, and I think it was reflex action with Max Baer. Now I heard a lot of people say he hit him with a left, and some people said he hit him

with a right, but I'm positive he hit him with *both*. Baer hit Murphy with a left and set him up and then hit him with that right, and he went down, whop! [sound of hitting the table] Just like that. And his head was turned like that, and I was sitting right there. I was looking right in his eyes, and they were open and glazed, and he had rosin in one of them. I thought he was dead, and, by golly, so did Max Baer, because they started to count. They got to about five, and Baer said, "For God sake, stop counting! Find a doctor!" And so they got a doctor, and they got him up, and he was still out though. And I heard afterwards that he claims that he don't remember a thing that happened after he got hit until about a day and a half later.

Wow!

He moved around, he did things, he talked to people, but he says he can't remember a thing. So that really must have Well you know, somebody . . . if you knock a bull out I've seen bulls shot with a twenty-five caliber pistol right up close: they don't even bat an eye! [laughter]

So he had to have a powerful punch, Baer did.

Oh, boy. I'll say. Yes.

You said that it started out like Baer was taking it easy on Murphy?

Yes.

Was there an agreement about that, or was it just a fighting style?

Yes, I think that was it. He was fighting for a thousand dollars, [against] a hometown boy, and I think that the plan was I think that's what Freddy Fields thought, or

at least that's what he said afterwards. And, of course, Freddy is the one who promoted this thing, too. And he's the one who pushed Murphy. He thought Murphy was good. Well, Murphy was good fighting the local people. But anyway, they seemed like they were just sparring around a little bit. They were throwing a few blows up high and stuff like that, but

But then when Murphy really socked him one, then Baer just kind of went into action.

Yes. Yes, and I think it was reflex action. I don't think he meant to hit them that hard. [laughter]

It was never the intention at the beginning of the fight that there was going to be a knockout, do you think?

I don't think so. I think that they planned on fighting, and they

Good show for the public.

Sure. And they were hoping that some way or the other that Murphy would get the decision or something, or a knockout if possible, I suppose. But they didn't really expect it. I don't think anybody expected it, except maybe Murphy and maybe Freddy Fields. I don't know. [laughter]

Was there a lot of betting on that fight?

Not that I know of. Well, I don't think anybody You'd have a hard time getting a bet.

Why?

Well, I know I sure wouldn't have bet against Baer. I know that. [laughter] But maybe some of the local Tonopah people might have. Maybe they did bet on Murphy. I don't know.

Yes. That was a big event. Were there other fights held in Silver Peak?

Oh, sure.

Yes. But that was the one most known.

There's a picture in that book of a ring in Silver Peak in the middle of town on the (I don't know) Fourth of July or Labor Day or something. They'd have blocks and matches of local guys that get together.

Yes. So it was a popular sport.

Yes. Kind of. Not real popular, but it was something to fill in time. And in Tonopah, you know, they had a lot of good fighters, of course. Buddy Traynor and Don Senowski. There's a picture of that in here somewhere.

In your Shamberger book?

Yes, Shamberger's book about the fights in Silver Peak. That's to verify it.

You said there was a misconception . . . that Baer said, "Call for a doctor."

Yes, that's what I said. That's not what Shamberger said.

He told a different story?

He said that Baer went over and got him up and said, "Well, we gave them a good show," or something like that. That's what he used to say. Let's see . . . oh, they had referee Tom Sharkey. He's the old-timer. He counted to five, and evidently Big Ed was out. Baer lifted Murphy to his feet saying, "You're all right partner. You wanted a show, didn't you?" he said to ringsiders.

But that's not what you . . . ?

That's not what I heard. And that's not what my sister heard either.

Yes. Gerry was there, too?

Yes. Although she said she wasn't in the front row like I was. I was always in the front row, and that's how I always got in trouble. [laughter] There's another picture in here somewhere.

You also mentioned another story. The Crater, the big cone that's outside of Silver Peak.

Yes.

That's a real landmark around Silver Peak.

Well, this happened a long time ago. There's something here about it that said it happened in more recent years. I don't think it did. I think it happened . . . Well, it may have. I don't know, but if it did it was after I left there, because I didn't know about it.

Yes. It had something to do with the crater?

A long time ago . . . There's Fred Vollmar (that was after though). He was getting older, and I think he was kind of sick.

Oh, really?

Yes, and that was his wife, Lois. But a long time ago, Jim Cleary had the finest team of horses in the country. He was always kind of scary of things. There'd come out a story about how that crater there at Silver Peak was one of the last to become extinct. Well, Vollmar and Ernie Shirley and some of those other old-timers, they went out, and they hauled a bunch of wood and some gas and some rubber and some green

things; anyway, they built a fire in there.
[laughter]

In the crater? In the cone of the crater, yes.

And that smoke came up, and Jim Cleary saw that, and he got his team, and he took off for Fish Lake Valley. [laughter] They said he liked to run that team to death. And there's something I didn't tell you . . .

Because he thought the volcano was going again, is that why?

Yes, he thought that was all ready to . . .

To blow up. [laughter]

To blow up. [laughter] And there's another thing I didn't tell you about people over there. You asked me farther back (this is out of sequence) about how they amused themselves. Well, out around Silver Peak and Goldfield when there were less people there, when they get a new person in town or somebody that didn't know about it, they had what they called a Casey Sisters trick. Have you ever heard of that?

I have heard of it, but tell me again.

Well, the story is always . . . There were two girls named the Casey sisters, and they were very attractive girls, and it was real nice to have a date with them if you could. But their father was a mean old son-of-a-gun, and so people didn't dare go out there when he was there. But he happened to be gone. You know, he was going to be gone on this particular night, and so this guy was going to go out, but he wanted to take somebody with him because there's two girls, so he asked this fellow, "Since you're my buddy, I'll take you along." or "Since you're new here, and I want to introduce you." A lot of times they would take maybe a box of candy or something. And they'd get

out there, and they would knock on the door. The fellow that was guide, he'd holler, "Hey, Susie, everything OK?" And about that time, the door would open and here a guy'd jump out with a shotgun. It's dark, you see, and it's dark inside the house except they'd have a candle burning in the back. "So you're the so-and-so who's been fooling around with my girl in here." Hauls off and shoots that shotgun in the air. And you'd be surprised how people can travel. [laughter]

Scare off the newcomer?

Yes, that's right. And, you know, it was really amazing some of the things that would happen. This one guy (I was there this night when this happened), he comes out there, and he's a big fat fellow. He was wearing . . . you know these old straw hats they used to have, the hard rib type and crown was hard; everything was hard. Well, he come out there, and he was a fat guy, and he didn't have much hips. He was all dressed up, and he had this hat on, and he had a box of candy in one hand and a bottle of booze in the other, and when they shot at him, he took off. Well, he was afraid he was going to lose his pants, so he dropped the candy, and he held on to his belt. Then he was afraid he was going to lose his hat, so he dropped the bottle and held on to his hat with his other hand. [laughter] And so he goes across the tailings pond—this was just there by my folks' house or just below it. He goes across the tailings pond, and there was a burro laying there, and he stumbled over the burro. And anyway, he went down.

Some hoboes were coming through town there, and they stopped to see if they could get a job. They were staying out at this spring, and he goes over there and changes clothes with one of them. One of them was a big fat guy, and he changed his clothes, and he took this old guy's clothes, and he claimed afterwards that he stumbled over a jackrabbit, but that was that burro. And so

from then on his name was Jackrabbit Kelly.
[laughter]

[laughter]

And another guy went home and crawled under the bed. [laughter] Oh, boy, it was awful. You know, really, we got in trouble a couple of times though.

How?

Well, one time over at Goldfield they took this kid out there; he was just a big, tall, kind of an innocent kid, and he was probably, I don't know, sixteen or seventeen years old maybe. They took him up towards Rabbit Springs in Goldfield. That was up toward the mountain there. There's a lot of greasewood stuff down through that canyon, and when they shot at him, he took off. It was at night, you know. The moon was shining back over this way, but you were in the shadow of the mountain. So part of it was a shadow, and you could see him going over these clumps of brush. That's all you could see was him going over the brush.

Well, then he didn't show up, and he turned up missing. So the sheriff had all us guys on a lineup there. Boy, and he wanted to know where he was, and we didn't know where he was. There were some old holes up there, and we went down some of those old holes looking for him. He wasn't down in those. He was hiding up in the attic of his house, and he was . . .

He was so scared.

His folks, he wouldn't even tell them. He'd go down and get something to eat when they were out. And he was up there for three days before they found him. Boy.

You guys were in big trouble?

Oh, the sheriff, he didn't like that. But we did that to a lot of guys out at Silver Peak. One time a guy got trapped. They was worried about his running and got behind him, and he couldn't run. He was a truck driver, and he grabbed the guy with a gun: they were fighting over the gun. Geez, we were afraid the guy was going to get shot. [laughter] But, you know, just think of the crazy ways that they had, making their own amusement . . .

Yes. In contrast to some of these kind of wild and fun stories, you mentioned that most of the people that you grew up with in Silver Peak really turned out well. Why do you think that was?

Around that whole country, not just there, but everywhere where they had like these one-room schools they talk about.

Yes.

But you never heard of one of them that was illiterate, never did. And many of those people actually (of course, this would be pretty hard to come up with a bunch of names right now), they turned out to be very responsible people who made their mark.

On Nevada. You mean, a number of them have been prominent in Nevada history?

Oh, sure. That's right. Well, like Fred Vollmar is one, for example. But that doesn't mean they didn't go on and get a higher education. What I mean is they got their start in a one-room school. Yet, I remember we talked with these local kids and with my grandkids as they were growing up and my great-granddaughter, they don't have near the knowledge that I remember like our kids had at their age. Of course, our kids were never in a one-room school or anything like that. But they were still doing that in that general area. So they had these local people

that went through these local schools and, of course, a lot of times the University of Nevada. I've got a lot of friends that have young kids, kids the age of my kids, they have all really made their mark.

Yes. And you think it had to do with the education?

I sure do. Just like they say, people run down the University of Nevada, and yet my son-in-law, he took a masters at U.C.L.A. He excelled there. So evidently he must have had a good basic education, or he wouldn't have been able to do that.

Because he came from the University of Nevada.

That's right.

You were also mentioning Mary Frazzini.

Yes, well, before that I mentioned Fred Balber who was from Elko, and he did well. Mary Frazzini did very well. She was on several committees here, and she was in the Nevada State Assembly for a couple of terms. And her brother Hugh [Cameron], he did very well in business and a mining partner in the management of mines, and they were both I believe they were both born in Silver Peak and went through school in Silver Peak, whenever they *had* schools there. Otherwise, they would have had to go to Tonopah or Goldfield or someplace else. But they did well. And there are other people who, I think, did well but in a lot of different ways, in different fields.

Let's talk about after you left Silver Peak. You left, what, to go off to the service? Is that when you left?

No, no.

You left before that?

I left before the service, before the war started. I left after the war had started in Europe and after the United States had started supplying our allies. But I left there in about 1940, and I went up to the tungsten mine with my father. And then later, I worked on construction here in Reno at Stead Air Force Base and in Herlong. And then from there I got my notice to go to the service, and I went down to Hawthorne and Tonopah and worked there until they called me up. I came back in, I don't know, about 1946.

Back to Nevada.

Back to Nevada. And my wife happened to be in Hawthorne, because that's where her folks lived, and she stayed with them while I was gone. So I went back to Hawthorne, and then I stayed there until I retired.

Where did you serve in World War II? Where were you stationed?

I never left the United States. I was in the coast artillery.

How did you end up in Reno?

My daughter lives in Reno, and my son lived in Carson City. And so she wanted to be near the kids.

Your wife did?

Yes, so we came here.

But you did live in Hawthorne for a number of years then?

Oh, yes. We were there from 1946 until 1973.

And what did you do there?

I was a management analyst. I was on the commanding officer's staff. My wife was a traffic manager.

And both of those jobs were for the army?

They were both navy back then, and then we retired before the army took it over.

Oh, I see.

And now the army has contracted it out to the DMZ, but the army also has a few officers there.

I see. Because, yes, you just showed me an award that your wife received, and that's listed as the army, but that came after?

Well, it's because of the ammunition shipments and stuff. That's why. Yes, but she worked for the navy.

Did you ever go back to Silver Peak after you left?

Yes, one time.

One time? When did you go?

Well, I went back there for a couple of funerals, but that was a long time ago. And then probably during the 1950s or 1960s . . . remember when they had this bottle craze where the colored bottles . . . ?

Collecting bottles, yes, from the old ghost towns.

Yes. Well, there used to be all kinds of those bottles up around Blair, out of Silver Peak.

Right. It's like three miles outside of Silver Peak.

Yes. This fellow, he was a navy officer . . . I believe he was a supply officer. He was going to have to leave there, and he wanted a colored bottle to take with him. So he asked me if I knew where he could get one. And I said, "Yes, I know where there's a lot of them." So I told him, "Let's go to Silver Peak" and see if we can get him some bottles. So we drove over to Silver Peak, and we went up to the old town of Blair, and the whole country was dug up. That's when they'd had this craze of bottles that all these people come in from California and dug up the whole world, I think! Anyway, we couldn't find a single bottle that wasn't broken. And so I went to town to find out. Well, Jimmy Gavin and Marie, they had this little old house there; that's where Ma Brown and them started that first thing. It was nothing but a little shack. Anyway, they had a bar in there.

Was it the Shifting Sands Bar?

That's probably the name. But anyway, that's where it was, and I went in there and asked Jimmy if he knew where I could find some bottles. He says, "No, they've dug them all up." He said, "I've been looking, too, and I can't find any." Somebody gave me a bottle. Maybe it was Ma Shirley, but somebody gave me a bottle. Anyway, I took my bottle. But they sent for everybody in town. Everyone wanted you to have a drink with him, so I'd have a beer. And, you know, we pretty near had to feel our way back to Hawthorne! [laughter]

[laughter] By the time you had a drink with everyone!

Well, yes, they keep a sending for people. Mrs. Shirley and Ethel happened to be over there that day, so she stopped by and . . .

And they all remembered you?

And Ruby. Yes, oh, sure.

So it was a real homecoming when you dropped in.

Yes. They were doing that lithium mining there.

In the 1960s that started, yes.

It wasn't the same.

It wasn't the same? How did that change it in your mind?

Well, I don't know. But when we were there, there was more activity; there was more going on. And here it was pretty quiet.

Pretty quiet when you went back compared to when you were there in the 1930s and 1940s.

I remember one time (I guess I told you this before about Mr. Shirley), he had a well

in his backyard. And the health officers come out. They tested it and said it wasn't fit to drink. Told him that he should quit using it, and he said he was in his eighties and had been using it all his life. [laughter]

Hadn't killed him yet. [laughter]

Yes!

Are there any other stories that we missed while we've been talking? You may think of some after we turn off the tape this time, but I think we covered a lot of different areas. Any memories that really stand out that we maybe haven't touched on yet?

Well, I don't think so. I don't know. There might be, but I don't know what they would be.

OK, thank you.

JACK BRODIE

IN OCTOBER 1996, Jack Brodie was interviewed at his grocery store in Fernley amidst piles of paperwork, demanding phone calls, and friendly customers. At the time, he was undergoing chemotherapy—yet another demand on his time and energy. In spite of it all, he was very interested in recording his memories of the Gordon-Brodie Mine and Mill. His descriptions contained details of mining and milling technology as well as investors and owners. The Depression years were not easy for the Brodie family, especially after the mill burned down. Jack recalled his two-job system of survival, which he developed during his high school years when the mine no longer supported his family.



VICTORIA FORD: Today is October 21, 1996, and I'm here with Jack Brodie at his store in Fernley. It's called the Country Store, and we're going to be talking about Silver Peak, Nevada. Jack, tell me first, what is your connection to Nevada?



(Photograph courtesy of Ruby Brodie.)

JACK BRODIE: My connection to Nevada is, I think, I'm about a fifth-generation Nevadan. My grandparents and great-grandparents were from Pioche and Panaca, and I have ancestors that came across the plains with the handcarts with the Mormon pioneers and eventually settled in Panaca

and Pioche. I have a sister who was born in Pioche, a sister older than I am, and I was also born in Pioche.

My father [W.E. Brodie] worked in the mines in Pioche. He was from Denver, Colorado, and as a seventeen-year-old boy he ran away from home and ended up working in the mines in Pioche. After he was married, they left Pioche and went to Nevada City. Then they left Nevada City in about 1924 and went to Tonopah, and he worked in the mines in Tonopah. He was an underground foreman for the Tonopah Extension Mining Company for Victor Shaft. And the mines closed in 1929, and he went prospecting for gold. Silver had gone to near nothing, so gold was the precious metal that everyone was looking for. And he found a few claims, but they weren't very good.

But he found a claim out at Silver Peak that was up in the Red Mountain Mining District. It was owned by (a man, I can't recall his name right now, but I will). Swenson [John L. Swanson. Brodie pronounces it Swenson, but records show it was Swanson] was his name. It was just a little hole in the ground, but it did have . . . you could see gold in the quartz . . . in the bottom of the claim. And he wanted to sell his claim, but my father didn't have any money. The banks had closed, and we lost any money that we did have. And we didn't have any wages—my father didn't have any wages coming in or anything. And there were some investors around, some of the people who did have money. Even as far back as New York and Los Angeles and everywhere, they were looking for gold properties to invest some of their money in.

And somehow or another my father met up with a man by the name of Ray Gordon, and he was a newlywed. He had met his wife on a trip around the world, and they got married. Her name was Curtis, and her folks had quite a bit of money. They owned a lot of property in the San Diego area. And they owned some beachfront property, and they

owned a lot of the property that had oil on it there. And they were looking to invest some money . . . maybe as a wedding present to the newlyweds, invest in some gold property for them or something.

So they got together with my father, and together they made a deal with this Swanson that owned this little mining claim. The only way he would sell it was for cash. And they tried to talk him out of taking cash for it—to maybe hold an interest in the claim, take part cash and then hold an interest in the claim and then sharing the profits. But he would have no part of that. He wanted all cash and . . . I don't think I ever knew the figures, but they paid him full cash for this mining claim. And he put all that money in the bank, and then the bank closed . . . and he lost all his money in the bank.

He had another little piece of property, by the property my dad had, that had a little spring on it. And he lived there until he died. My father really took care of him and helped him out with groceries. And in the wintertime they were snowed in completely while my father was working the claim he had there. That was the main claim, and then they staked out other claims around there. One of the claims that I remember was the Valcalda claims, and that was adjoining my father's property. And then, of course, they called it the Mary Mine. E.L. Cord bought that, and that was the Cord property during my dad's . . . they had adjoining claims. And my father ended up, he owned fifty-four claims up there. They all had small values, but at this time gold was only thirty-five dollars an ounce, so you had to have pretty good ore. It was all underground, and it was in a hard quartz—couldn't be mined similar to the way they do today in big masses of gravel, because there was really hard quartz and underground.

My father developed the mine. I remember the first shipment that they made out of the mine. They shipped in

burlap bags that were paper lined, and they came from California. They were fertilizer bags. And they sacked all of this ore up in these bags and sent it to the smelter in Utah. They had an armed guard arrive in an ore car from Blair Junction. They trucked it to Blair Junction and then put it in a car of the Tonopah and Goldfield Railroad, [which] came through there then. And took that ore car to Utah to the smelter. Maybe it was Murray, Utah? Is that where the smelter is?

I don't know.

I don't remember the name of the town. Anyway, Utah. But that was quite a big, big thing—this first shipment was. As I remember it, every piece of ore, every rock that you would pick up, you could see gold in it somewhere—whether it was a stream or maybe it had what we call bug holes. It was in the quartz, and bug holes in the quartz had little pieces of gold hanging in there. It was really neat.

You can remember seeing it?

Oh, yes.

Because how old were you then?

This had to be . . . I was only about ten maybe.

Yes. Early 1930s then? So this was a valuable load, is that right? The value of this ore was pretty good?

Yes, at thirty-five dollars an ounce, it was a good shipment. Anyway, they took the money from that, and then he had subsequent shipments. I think that's the only one I can remember that they bagged. The rest of it went just as truck loads, or dump trucks for this ore . . . rocks.

Why did they bag it? Was that unusual?

They bagged it because it was so valuable. It was such high grade—all really high grade. After that, then it wasn't that high grade, but it was valuable.

So they took out the highest grade first, and then they carefully shipped that with an armed guard and in bags.

When they first developed the mines, it was high grade, and then it wasn't quite as high grade as they went on into the mine. [They] had an incline shaft that went down to fifty feet. The first deal on the mine was probably only ten-feet deep. It wasn't very deep at all. And the bottom of the mine was this high-grade gold. And then as they mined it and followed the veins, down there on the fifty-foot level where they started to run drifts and tunnels or whatever it was, they arrived . . . A thing that was kind of ironic about it was about a hundred yards—about the length of a football field, I guess, from the shaft—was the gold mine that had the high grade in it. The original person that prospected that area [only] found a little vein. It was kind of a rolling hill, and he went into the side of this hill and followed a little vein of quartz, oh, probably, sixty, seventy-five feet in to the side of the hill. It had some value but not enough value to really mine it. And then he quit and just left that tunnel in there. Then they drove a shaft up to the top of the hill, and it was a kind of a ventilation through there. My father put a door on the front of that tunnel, and we used it as a cellar. It stayed in there (I forgot the temperatures) maybe forty degrees when it was maybe eighty outside. And it still was forty degrees at maybe ten below in the wintertime. It stayed a constant temperature in there, and they used it as a cellar. We used to hang hams and bacon and even fresh meat and things in this cellar, because we didn't have refrigeration.

You could store all kinds of things, all kinds of food in there?

We stored all of the food in the cellar. They built shelves in there on the walls, and then the meat we had hanging from hooks and everything there. But the thing that was ironic about it was, through the years my dad was kind of developing the property to sell, I think, and he would follow an ore body until it was pretty rich or until it was good, real good. And then he would leave that and follow another ore vein and another drift or stope or something. And at one time, everywhere you went in that mine there was high-grade ore. By high grade, maybe, say thirty-five-dollar ore—that was carrying an ounce to a ton. And that was kind of considered high grade. Anyway, they took out shipments.

And in the meantime, I don't know whether the money all came from the mine or whether more money came from the investors, but they built a little twenty-five-ton mill, and they bought another property that was out of Manhattan. It was called the Van S Quicksilver Mine, and it was a mine that had, early days, mined quite a bit of quicksilver [mercury] and then had shut down. But it had a retort, and it had a diesel power plant on it. They took that diesel power plant and moved it to Silver Peak and that powered the little twenty-five-ton mill that they had. At the quicksilver mine, they also had leasers that leased in there, and they got quicksilver out, and then they would buy the quicksilver and use it at the gold mine to use in a mill they had, which was amalgamation and flotation.

Was not one of the cyanide mills then?

No, no. It was amalgamation and flotation. They used chemicals, but no cyanide. I'm sure it wasn't cyanide. And one of the chemicals that they used there, I'll never forget, was pine oil . . . because of the

pine smell in the mill. When you go in the mill it just had an enticing, pleasant smell, and that was from the flotation machine. It looked just like root beer floats. There's a kind of brown foam that came over the top, and that would carry the fine gold and then into a concentrate. And then what was left in the bottom was the tailings. You couldn't do it today, but in that day they just went down the wash.

I think it was International Smelting and Refining Company became very interested in that property, and they purchased it from my father and from Gordon, the Gordon-Brodie property. And my father wasn't going to make the mistake that Swanson did, and he didn't take all the money. He took it in payments, and they operated the mine for two or three years. I can't remember exactly how many. And what they did is, they just followed every vein that my dad had until it petered out, and when there wasn't any more they went to the next one. They didn't develop as they went along. And then, all of a sudden, they didn't have any really good ore inside anymore, so they quit making their payments, and my father and Gordon repossessed the property.

So they repossessed it?

Well, they took the property back [after] it was eighteen months that I know of. When they sold the property, we went on a vacation in the summer and went to Denver to see my grandfather. He owned the stone quarries in Lyons, Colorado, and he had been a stonemason. All my uncles were stonemasons and everything, and they owned this big stone quarry in Lyons, Colorado.

I was noticing this Sayre-Brodie mansion [looking at photographs]. That's your grandfather's?

That's my grandfather's home, and this is my grandfather up there [pointing to the balcony].

Yes, with the bowler hat.

My grandfather was Scotch, and he had a partner that was a strict Irishman. And on the quarry they had a big gymnasium. If any of the men would have any quarrels or anything, they would go in the gymnasium and settle it with the gloves. And my grandfather and his partner were the same thing. If they had problems with the men or something, they would go and put the gloves on in the gymnasium and just fight it out—just vent out their anger and then shake hands afterwards, I guess, and were friends. But my grandfather and his partner got in a big argument, and they went to the gym and put on the gloves, and my grandfather knocked the Irishman down or out or whatever it was. And so he got up, and he decided right then and there that he would not be a partner with anybody that could whop him. And so he would either buy my grandfather out, or my grandfather would buy him out. And my grandfather, somehow, he bought him out, and that's how he became the sole owner of the stone quarries in Lyons, Colorado.

Did you ever know why your father ran away from home when he was a young man? Do you know that story?

That was something that was never really discussed in our family, but we lived in Denver for eighteen months with my grandfather, and we stayed there and lived in this home. And my father went all over Utah and Montana and Wyoming and everything, prospecting, looking for other properties during that eighteen months.

And you, and your mom, and your sisters stayed there?

My sisters stayed in Denver. I went to school in Denver for one year. I went to junior high school.

Was this the first time, do you know, that your father had been back to his father's home since he ran away?

No, when my father originally ran away My grandfather was a very strict disciplinarian, and they just had . . . I don't know what, but they got into a big argument, and my father ran away. And my grandfather was stubborn enough to where he wouldn't make him come back, but he sent his oldest son, who was John, to go and follow my father and make sure that he didn't get hurt. And they went to Loveland, Colorado, and he worked in the sugar-beet fields there. And then he wasn't going to have any part of that, and he heard about the mines in Pioche, and so he went to Pioche and worked in the mines there. And his brother, John, was with him all the time until my father got married. When my father got married, John went home, but my father never did. But then his mother passed away, and he went home when his mother passed away. I think my father was seventeen when he ran away, and I think he was twenty-one when he finally went home.

So he had been back, and then he came back again and brought his family and left you all there and then went on prospecting.

Right. And his father came and visited us in Tonopah one time, his father and his sister. After his first wife had died and then he remarried, and then his second wife passed away also, and then he lived in this home. They had a little porch [second story balcony] up here, and I had an aunt that came out and was up on this porch hollering to her brother that was down here, and this was a flagstone sidewalk going up there. She fell off of there and down onto the sidewalk,

and she was an invalid the rest of her life, and she lived in that home until she died. And that was my grandfather's stipulation, that that home was maintained for Peg as long as she lived.

And that was your aunt?

And then I had another aunt who didn't have any children, and her and her husband lived there and took care of my grandfather and my Aunt Peg. And the home was for any of the family to come through anytime they wanted. They maintained the home. And then when the grandfather died, my aunt and her husband kept the home for Peg until she died. And then when Peg died, they settled the estate with the quarries and everything. There were nine heirs and there were nine shares. And for the one share for my one aunt who had lived in the home all her life, they gave her the home. She eventually sold the home. Another party bought it and absolutely ransacked it. And then two lawyer ladies bought it, and they are renovating it to put it back . . .

Restoring it?

Restoring it, and it is in the book in Denver of things to see in Denver. As a matter of fact, this iron fence was never around it. This is kind of a picture of it the way it is now today, being renovated again as it was.

So when you lived there the fence wasn't there, but the house looked like that otherwise.

Then I found this [indicating a small ceramic model].

It really looks like the same house, doesn't it?

Almost the same house. Yes, it looks so much alike. This was a parlor. I have some pictures of it. I'll show you.

OK, we'll look at them in a little bit. So this was after your father had sold the Gordon-Brodie Mine?

Yes, but then he repossessed it.

So then did you go back when he repossessed it?

Right. Then we moved back to Tonopah, and my father started to mine again and tried to develop the mine. They milled. I think they could mill ore as low as eight dollars a ton and break even. If it was over that, they could make money. And he ran the little twenty-five-ton mill. But in the eighteen months, all the payments he got and everything, he had reinvested in other prospector deals, and so he really came back to the mine broke and without any money. And the Gordon and Curtis financiers didn't feel like putting a lot more money into it. So if we didn't get some money out of the mine, why, we didn't put anything into it. So it was a struggle to do the assessment work, and then we had fifty-four claims. And I think five (I'm not sure) of the main claims were patented, so they paid taxes on those, and then all of the work they did on them counted as assessment work for the adjoining claims.

That's what I was going to ask. All fifty-four were right in that area, all adjoining?

All adjoining, yes. The Valcalda property bordered it on one area there. The Cord property bordered it on another area. Then there was, I think, two claims or five claims right in the middle of my father's that my father didn't own, and it was owned by a man by the name of Hanchett. You know, Hanchett properties. And there was kind of

a feud there between my father and Hanchett. As a matter of fact, Hanchett brought an apex lawsuit against my father one time claiming that he was higher or something, and the ore that my father had taken out was on his deal. I forgot how an apex is, but if it goes through the end line, it's yours. If it goes through a side line, it's yours, or something. Anyway, my father won the apex suit. I imagine there's probably some records of that in the Goldfield courthouse.

Yes. So there was some feuding going on between them. Was it just in court, or do you remember anything else? Were they unfriendly to each other?

Yes, very. My father was, and I think my father took a couple of shots at somebody. As I remember, someone went to one of the stakes that bordered the claim, and my father had the rifle by the kitchen door of the bunkhouse, and he'd take a couple of shots at somebody up there, and they left. And as far as I know, I don't think any charges were ever made on anybody.

But as my father was trying to bring the mine back a little bit, there were three or four springs that were five miles away from the camp that my father had developed, and they had a pump house, and they had the springs all come to one big, wooden water tank at a pump house. And then they had a pump house there with a diesel engine on it that pumped water to the very top of the hill. And then they had another big wooden tank up there, and then a gravity flow from there for five miles into the camp. And every winter the pipeline would freeze up. I spent some of my winters up there as a kid freezing to death, digging up the pipeline where it went down into a lower area, and we'd build fires on it and get it all thawed out and do that all the way to camp until we got water running in the camp again.

I can't remember just what year it was, but the mill caught on fire while my dad was in town one time. But when he got back up there the mill had burned to the ground.

Were you there at that time?

No, I was in Tonopah, and I think my father was also, but there were some of the miners and personnel there. I think that someone had turned the valve off, and the pipeline was froze, so there was no water for the mill, so they couldn't put out the fire in the mill.

But I remember my grandfather from Pioche was a mining engineer, and he came and helped. His name is Frank Walker, and he did a lot of work on the mine. He drew underground maps of the workings of the mine, and resurveyed out all of the property lines and recorded all of that, and worked with my father for several years in the early . . . before he sold . . .

When the mill burned down, that had to be pretty devastating to your father, because he was in the process of trying to build it back up. Is that right?

It was . . . it was almost the end of my father. It . . . just the trauma he went through and everything was just really bad at the time.

Do you remember it as a kid?

Yes, very, very much.

As a kid, how could you tell how hard it was?

On my father? Well, I don't know how you would tell. It hit me really hard. Also, I kind of liked the mine until we went back the second time after my father had sold it, then I didn't like the mine so much. I

thought it was too hard a life. I wanted something better.

One thing that was real ironic about it, I was telling you about the tunnel that they used as a cellar, and the original shaft was an incline shaft that went down to the fifty-foot level. And when we sold the mine they drove a tunnel. They used to bring the ore up out of the incline and put it in a dump truck and then drive the dump truck over to a big ore bin that was at the mill. But when the International Smelting Company took it over, they ran a drift from the fifty-foot level over about where we were running the truck and then they sank a vertical shaft. And so they would bring the ore to the vertical shaft and hoist it up to the surface, and then they ran just a track from the hill to the mill. The mill was built on the side of a hill, and to the high part of the mill was the ore bin, and they just trammed in an ore car over to the bin and dumped it in a bin right at the mill.

Is that where the headframe is now?

Yes.

So that's the shaft that you're describing?

That's the vertical shaft. Now, not too far from that, on the . . . it would be on the north side, is where the incline shaft was. But the thing that was ironic about it—while they were on the thirty-foot level, I think, and the fifty-foot level (and most of the workings was on the fifty-foot), they had stopes and drifts and things into the fifty-foot. It was the main level to the shaft. When I think they sank the shaft maybe seventy-five, hundred feet and then abandoned it. I think they diamond drilled a lot of that area before they turned it back to my father, and so they came to the conclusion there was no more high grade there, and my father always thought there was. He was going to find it again like he did, and that's typical of a miner.

But getting back to this tunnel, they drove a drift back toward underneath the tunnel, and one of the richest bodies of ore in the mine broke into the tunnel. The original miner that mined there probably wasn't three feet from the biggest ore body in the whole mine. It ended up a great big huge stope that broke into the original tunnel. I imagine (you say you've been up there) now that might have caved in. It might be kind of a glory hole there. I don't know. Because it was pretty shallow. The tunnel went into the side of the mountain. There wasn't a lot on top. And then, of course, the underground stope came up and broke into that tunnel, so it wouldn't have taken much to . . . Of course, through the years and everything, it might get just like a hill.

Yes, it's hard to know, because they're already starting to work up in there, and some of the leach ponds and so on are going to be up in that area. So one of the things is that right near that headframe to the vertical shaft is where they were digging the well for water.

If you're up at the headframe, and you were looking kind of northwest, it would kind of run down a little valley and then there's a hill up there? That Hanchett property . . . there was a road up there, and I imagine it's still there. And the Hanchett property was on the left of that road on the hill up in that area.

So it would have been up to the northwest from the headframe where Hanchett was?

Yes, up on the side of the hill. And then, all of the property to the left of that was my father's, and they went way on . . . over and then . . .

Down towards where the old Valcalda mill was? The stone remains of that are still

down just over the hill from the headframe and down into a little gully. It that right?

Is that Valcalda or was that Del Papa? Frankie Sue Del Papa's grandfather had some claims in there. They never did operate them that I knew of, not at the time that my father operated his anyway. There was a two-stamp mill in there on the Del Papa property. But the mill wasn't there: it was just the stamps. There was no building over it or anything. It was pretty dilapidated. And the Del Papas, whoever had that originally, just abandoned it, I guess. And I think the Del Papas . . . I think it was Frank and Fred were the two boys, and Egilio was the father. And that was Frankie Sue Del Papa's great-grandfather, maybe? He had a little store and a bar in Tonopah. And the store was all Italian goods they had in there. I remember most of the miners that worked for my father were Italian, and that's why I love to eat pasta.

[laughter] Grew up with it.

Lots of pasta.

I want to just ask you a question before you go on with your story. You were in Tonopah, so your family did not live in Silver Peak while your dad was working up there?

Right, we lived in Tonopah.

Why was that? Do you know?

Probably because we were in the schools. Also, this is in the Depression, and my father was the underground foreman for the Tonopah Extension Mining Company. They kept personnel there. They had a huge mill, and they had a huge mining property. And we lived in a company house at the Victor Shaft, and we were the watchmen there. I can't remember, but I think we got

ten dollars a month and a house to live in as watchmen on the property. They had to have that for fire insurance, and my father (this was before he went into Silver Peak) walked a route every night. He had a clock, and there were stations all over the property that had a little metal box there and had a key in it. This clock that he carried had a paper disk in it and a clock. And he would go to that station, and he'd put that key in the clock and turn it, and that would punch the thing [disk, showing] that he was at that station at that time. And he would walk the route at night.

We had a Model T car that he would jack up rather than crank it. He would jack up the back wheel and turn the wheel—put it in gear and turned the wheel to start the car, and then he would drive over to the mill where they had a power plant. It was probably two miles away from the mine, from the shaft, and he would walk a route there at night and punch his clock. Then, when he went prospecting, they kind of gave up this . . . Maybe he got paid for that, too. I don't know, but they still paid us to live there and rent free.

But he didn't have to walk the property anymore?

No, he didn't walk the property anymore. And that's when he was kind of prospecting and found the deal at Silver Peak. At the mine there weren't accommodations to begin with. And then they built cabins up there, and they bought cabins in Tonopah and dismantled them and then hauled them up there and reassembled them up there. There were three of us kids, and we were in school in Tonopah, and we lived there . . . just lived there. My mother and father sometimes would be up at the mine for a week at a time, and my father would be up there. He'd come to town every week just about, I guess. He'd have to come for supplies and things anyway.

Yes. Were you kids left alone sometimes then? To get yourself to school and so on.

Yes, we were.

It wasn't unusual? My understanding is that some families lived in Goldfield so that the kids could go to school and then maybe came to Silver Peak for the weekends or, you know, the father would go to Goldfield. It wasn't unusual for families to live elsewhere than Silver Peak so that the kids could go to school.

It was kind of odd, because the mine was in Esmeralda County, and Goldfield was the county seat, and we were in Nye County.

You were in Tonopah.

And it was kind of odd, because my father did have to go to Goldfield quite a bit for legal mining claim deals and taxes and everything. But Silver Peak was a very, very small town when my father first went up there. There wasn't hardly anything in Silver Peak. At one time there was two or three or four buildings there and everything, but now I don't think any of them were working. And then Silver Peak kind of developed a little bit when Cord took over the Mary Mine, and he hired quite a few workers there, and then there was quite a bit of mining activity around Silver Peak. And then I think that was the beginning of Nivloc. And I can remember too . . . this had to be maybe the late 1920s when Weepah was supposedly going to be the big boom. And I remember going there with my father, and there's just a couple of tents here and there, just like it was out in the middle of nothing there. Some people milling around, and we spent the day there. I can't remember too much about it, but I remember we did go there. And then my father said that would never be anything, and he wasn't interested in it, and I guess we

never did . . . That was before he was up at Silver Peak.

Tell me a little bit more about Ray Gordon. Do you know how the two of them met so that he would get involved in investing?

I really don't. I think possibly Ray Gordon may have come to Tonopah, and most of the mining deals were all conducted in the bars. There was a Tonopah Club, and the Mizpah Hotel was a stock exchange in the early days. I can remember the Mizpah Hotel, when you walked in the lobby, and it looked like a bank, because it had all these windows, and it had a big blackboard on the wall with stock figures on every day, and it was a stock market.

They could have met in the Mizpah Hotel, or he may have come up there just . . .

Prospecting also?

Prospecting there. He was looking for a place to invest or mine, because the silver mines had all closed down in Tonopah. I think silver went to twenty-nine cents. And I think it was 1929 that the Victor with the Tonopah extension shut down. That really created havoc. And then I think it was probably two years later when the bank finally closed, and I think that's when my father had bought the claim. He probably only paid maybe a thousand dollars for the claim. That was a lot of money. As a matter of fact, my father sold that mine for \$250,000 dollars. It was a quarter of a million dollars, and we thought that was just . . . and it was. That had to be probably 1935 or 1936, somewhere around in there, and that would have been probably five million today at least. And like I say, gold was thirty-five dollars an ounce, and my dad always said, "Gold is going to go to seventy dollars. And when it goes to seventy dollars,

we'll have it made." But he never lived to see it.

Didn't get to see that, but it did do that.

Oh, did it. [laughter]

He probably wouldn't have believed how high it went.

Well, it went over to \$650, pretty near \$700 at its peak, I think.

He built up that mine, sold it for \$250,000, and then had to repossess it. Did he feel that it was bad mining practices which caused the other company to lose it, and they had to go back in and try to save the mines?

Yes, he did. He used to say all the time that all they did was went in and took the high grade out and didn't develop as they went. And he says, in order to keep the mine operating, you have to do development work. As you're taking out high grade, you have to develop the low grade and get it to go into the high grade, if you can, or develop the low grade and follow the veins and the quartz and the formations to open them up into a higher grade ore. He definitely said that that was all due to very poor mining. It was just going in there and taking the high grade and then give it back—about what it amounted to. But my father and Gordon owned that mine, I think, up until the time that my father died in 1960. I think they may have been behind on taxes.

But they never sold it again after that? Up until 1960.

No. They had some leasers in there that leased a little bit. And they had some junk people that went in there and removed a lot of the metal that was from the fire for the mill, and there was a huge ball mill in there.

They had their own diesel. I will never forget the diesel. It was a two-cylinder diesel, and when it was working right, it'd blow smoke rings. It'd go "chirk, chirk, chirk," and you'd hear it all day long and then blow the smoke rings.

Not far from that mine, around the southeast of the hill, was where the little spring is. And that was where Swanson That's where he had a little Well, I think really it was a cave with a wooden front on it that he lived in for a house. And he had a stove in there: a stovepipe came out the wooden front. And I know there was a spring, but we never used water from that spring. We used water from . . . over on Chiatovich's. Was it Coyote Springs?

Yes, I think that's right.

Chiatoviches were ranchers, and they had water rights in there, so we couldn't shut off all the water. We had to maintain this big water tank, and then they had to maintain a pond at the base of the water tank for the livestock that were in the area. I remember there were three springs in that area. And they built a house over there. They built a little cabin over there, and they hired a pump man that would run the pump every day, and they would run the water up to the top of the hill. And, of course, that was when the mill was running twenty-four hours a day. And then, when my dad re-took it over and everything, sometimes we wouldn't run the mill for a whole week while we was mining ore and building up our stock, and then maybe they'd run the mill ten, twelve hours a day.

I wanted to ask you, you said when the mill burned down that was just about the end of your father. Could you talk about what happened to your family from that point on? Did he continue to mine or . . . ?

Yes, my father continued to mine some, and I went to work. I had several jobs. I worked for a dairy, and I worked for a roller skating rink while I was going to high school. And then I went to work for Safeway, and then I worked for a service station. My last years in high school I hardly was ever home. I worked at Safeway until six o'clock, and then walked across the street to a service station and worked there until ten o'clock, and then I closed the service station, slept there all night and answered night calls and opened it at six in the morning until the owner came at eight, and then I went to school. And then when school was out, I went to work at Safeway again.

And then on weekends . . . on Saturday, on my job at Safeway, it was until eight o'clock at night, then worked in the service station until ten, closed it, slept there, answered night calls, and opened it Sunday morning.

Did you work Sunday, too?

I would open the station at six o'clock on Sunday morning. The Safeway store was closed on Sunday, so sometime during Sunday the person who owned the service station would come down and relieve me, and I would go home and get clean clothes and one thing or another, and maybe eat a meal with my family, and then go back at maybe six o'clock and close the service station at night at ten. And worked all night at thirty-five cents an hour. When I worked at the service station I got an hour's time for every night call that I would get up and answer.

This was in the Depression era. Nobody had any money, and he didn't have any money either, and I never drew a paycheck all the time I worked there. Finally, he went bankrupt and the Cavanaugh brothers (I don't know if you know them or heard of them), they bought him out or took over the bankruptcy deal or something, and the

wages had to be paid. And for the money they owed me, I got a little 1939 Plymouth convertible, and it had belonged to Lois Kellogg of the Kellogg corn flake thing. They had a ranch in Fish Lake Valley, the Kellogg Ranch, and she had turned that car in. It was worth, I think, six hundred dollars. That's what the car sold for. They owed me, I think, maybe up to two hundred dollars or something for the down payment, and then I made payments on the car after I got out of high school.

But then I was working for Safeway in Reno and was drafted into the service, and my father kind of gave up on the mining. And he went to work in a bar there and tended bar in Tonopah. Silver State.

In the Silver State bar?

And then he was doing that when I came home from the service. I went to work in a service station there in Tonopah for a while, and then I went to work for the Tonopah Club as a bartender. I was kind of wild coming home from the service. Every once in a while another one of my school mates or something would come home, and we'd have a party. We did a lot of partying. And I got married, and then my wife was pregnant, and I went on a big rampage and blew up at my boss's son. And they fired me. So I didn't have a job, didn't have any money. So the bar manager of the club loaned me twenty-five dollars.

I came to Reno to go back to work for Safeway. I was working for Safeway in Reno when I was drafted, and, supposedly, they had to hire me back, to give me my job back, but the district manager of Safeway wouldn't even talk to me. So I was going to go through the veterans and make them hire me and then quit. But in the meantime there was another store on South Virginia Street that was just going to open, and I walked out there and applied for a job, and the guy hired me for a day, just for a day. It

was a Friday. They were opening on Saturday, and I went to work for him, and I worked for him for five and a half years.

So during high school, you didn't actually earn a wage that you could take home to help your family, but you were eating your meals and doing things elsewhere. Was that a help to your family?

I really did, because I drew pay from Safeway.

Oh, you did get some pay from Safeway. I see, but not the gas station. Was that money for you, or did you have to help your family with that money?

No, it helped my family.

Because you said that was when the mill had burned down, and money was pretty tight.

Money was real tight. I can't really remember where my father got any finances from. I can't remember if they took some shipments out of the They must have taken some shipments out and shipped it to But I was kind of uninvolved with the mine in my last couple of years in high school, because I was working. Prior to working in Safeway, I worked at the dairy—when I washed milk bottles at a dairy for fifty cents a night. And on Saturday I bottled the milk and delivered it house-to-house and then washed the bottles for a dollar. But that was a big thing because I got to drive the pickup and delivered the milk.

That's a good thing for a teenage boy, huh?

Then I had a part-time job from there at a roller skating rink. Generally, I've always had a two-job system, but it took two jobs.

Even as a teenager, it took two jobs?

It really did.

That background in working for the grocery store seems to be what led you to this project in Fernley?

Well, really, working for the grocery store was the eighteen months that we were in Colorado. My uncle had a grocery store in Estes Park. And for the two summers that I was there I worked for him in that store. And that's what I always wanted to do, was to have my own store. And I eventually ended up doing that.

My time in Silver Peak was Actually, in Silver Peak itself, I was never in the town.

Not in the town? You were always at the mine?

My brother-in-law My older sister married a boy from Tonopah, and right after, he went to work in Silver Peak for the Northern Supply, and that was the Smith brothers, Lindsay and Gordon Smith. And he was kind of an all-around man there. He worked in the soda fountain; he worked in the hardware deal; and he ran the projector, I think, sometimes in the theater. They had a theater there. He did a little bit of everything. And he had a vacation coming, and that's when they got married. That had to be in 1939, because on their honeymoon they went to the World's Fair. That was when Treasure Island was created in San Francisco. And I'll never forget him talking about that, and my sister talking about it all the time. When he came back to go to work in Silver Peak, they had hired another person while he was gone, and they didn't have a place for him.

Just on his vacation they did that?

Yes, he came back married, no job, no money. They spent all their money on their

vacation, and they had it pretty tough for a long time. And he ended up in Reno, and he was working for the dairy that was owned by the Chisms. Anyway, he delivered milk for

the dairy. And then in 1941, Pearl Harbor came along, and they had the Reno blacksmith's shop

VICTOR KRAL

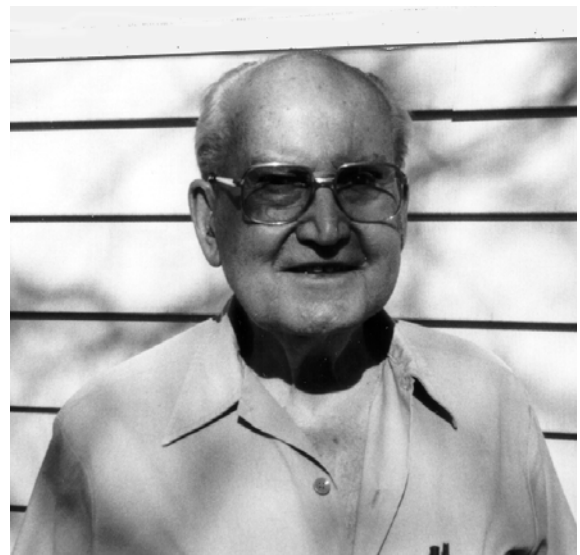
WHILE NEVADA'S mining industry survived the Depression years, students who were studying to become mining engineers, geologists, and metallurgists had a difficult time. Victor Kral of Reno is a well-known and respected mining engineer who, as a graduate of the University of Nevada, found a variety of small, temporary jobs to sustain his wife and himself through the Depression. One of those jobs was working in the E.L. Cord Mill at Silver Peak, which he described in detail in his 1996 oral history interview.



VICTORIA FORD: Today is September 17, 1996. I'm with Victor Kral in his home in Sparks, and we're going to be talking about Silver Peak, Nevada. I think first, Vic, what we want to start with is your birth date and where you were born.

VICTOR KRAL: I was born August 7, 1911, in Pasadena [California].

Then you grew up in California as a child?



Yes, I did. From Pasadena my parents (and I, of course) moved to Huntington Beach, California, and I was there, I guess, until about 1919.

So you were about eight years old when you left California?

Yes. I was just about eight years old. I was kind of a sickly child, and eight years is when I started the first grade.

Oh, really? You had health problems as a child?

Yes, I did. I don't even know what they were, but I was not very healthy when I was young.

And so you started first grade and . . . ?

And I had no problem there. Scholastically, I caught up without any problem.

You started at Huntington Beach, but then your parents moved?

Yes, then they moved into the Los Angeles area, or we might possibly at that time have moved to San Francisco for a short time. There were several times in my life when my parents went to San Francisco and stayed there maybe for six months or something like that and then moved back to the Los Angeles area.

Was it your parents' occupation that caused them move? Do you know why they moved?

I guess they just thought they might find conditions better. They were both tailors, and they worked at home. And one of my early moves was to what is now referred to as the Watts area. It wasn't like that at that time. It wasn't a fancy area by any means. But, anyway, it was not like it is now.

It was a safe place to live still?

Oh, yes, very safe.

How did you end up in Nevada? Did you come here with your parents or on your own?

No, I had a brother, a half-brother, and somehow or other we had lost track of him for about six, seven, eight years, something

like that. And through my inquiries, why, I finally found out where he was, and he found out that I was looking for him. And his wife corresponded with us, and, finally, I ended up by hitchhiking to Reno. [laughter]

That's where he lived?

Yes, he lived here in Reno.

And how old were you when you hitchhiked to Reno?

Sixteen.

Sixteen. Did your parents know you were going to do that?

Oh, yes. Well, in those days, why, hitchhiking was no problem for young people.

So you came to Reno, and did you stay?

I came to Reno, and I visited Reno one weekend, and I liked it so well, and I had an opportunity to go to school here, of course. So I think it was about a week or two later, why, I moved to Reno with all my belongings that I carried in a very small satchel. It was the size of a good-sized briefcase. [laughter]

You didn't have much.

No, I certainly did not.

You said you had an opportunity to come to school here. Were you finished with high school at that point?

No. No, I had one year to go. I had my senior year left. So I spent my senior year at Reno High. And Reno High at that time was where one of the gambling clubs is now; I forget the name of it.

It was in the downtown area?

Oh, yes. Reno High, on the corner of West and . . . between Fourth and Fifth, I believe it was, something like that. I graduated from Reno High here.

What year was it that you graduated?

1928.

Nineteen twenty-eight, OK. Were you living with your brother at that time?

Yes, I was living with my brother then. That's how I happened to be in Reno, because I had the opportunity to live with my brother and his wife and go to school here, of course. And then from high school, I was worried about my grades. I didn't think I could make it to get admitted to the university. But due to a fine gentleman who was principal of Reno High at that time—Otis Vaughn, well-known in the history of education here in the Reno area . . . I think there must be some schools around here named after him.

Yes. There's a Vaughn Middle School, I believe, named after him.

Well, that would be him. Anyway, thanks to him, he went over my credits and figured out that I just barely had enough to get in. So I started the university in the fall of 1928.

Were you still living with your brother, or did you go live on campus?

Yes. I was living with my brother.

As a freshman, did you know what field of work you wanted to go into?

I knew that I wanted to be an engineer, but I didn't know what. And it wasn't very long at the university, a month you might say, that I realized that I wanted to go into

civil engineering. So I started in civil engineering. After my freshman year I was looking for a summer job, and I somehow got acquainted with somebody at the Mackay School of Mines, and I found that there was work to be had at Ruth, Nevada, in the Ely area. I went there that summer. That was the first time I had worked underground.

In an underground mine?

Yes.

What kind of work did you do that summer?

Well, I first started helping a timber man, and . . .

What does a timber man do?

Timber man is replacing or putting new timbers in the mine. That's how I started out. But I'll have to give the company much credit there. They moved the students around quite a bit, so they'd get a pretty fair idea of what it was like.

Was it part of your education to be working there?

No. Just a summer job.

But the company was aware that you were a student.

The company was education-minded, in other words. And that company, by the way, was Nevada Consolidated Copper Company, which later became Kennecott.

OK. So you started assisting a timber man, but they moved you around?

Yes. Well, then I spent the rest of my time working on the ore trains, as a sort of a brakeman on the ore trains. It's interesting,

thinking back, that the ore trains were a very dangerous operation there.

How so?

Well, because there was very little space between the timbers and the ore trains coming by, and they go relatively fast.

About how fast would you say?

Well, I'd say they're going ten miles an hour or something like that, which is fast for a train underground.

And there's a narrow clearance?

Very little clearance. You have to stand between the timbers as the train's coming along. Of course, if you stand between the timbers, and considering the timbers there were about ten-by-tens, why, there was a fair amount of clearance there, but I can remember a few instances where it was close, you know, and quite dangerous. And that mine—the Star Pointer shaft is what I worked in—was using the caving system. And that means the ground is moving all the time, and, therefore, the timbers are being crushed and have to be replaced as you go along. And once in a while you get into some part of a drift where they were a little bit behind in replacing timbers, and it almost closes in. I recall one particular time I was walking through one of these drifts, and, suddenly, right behind me the whole back came down. And if I had been there, why, it would have crushed me, of course. I was lucky.

When you say caving system, was it planned that it caved in afterwards?

Yes, it was planned. It was planned that way so that you get the ground to gradually cave, and then you have ore chutes that go up into this caving ore. And you draw the ore

through the chutes into the drifts below and into cars. It's a very efficient method and is used quite a bit, particularly in South America, I believe. Now, I don't know of any place it's used in the United States.

But it is still used in the world somewhere?

Oh, yes. It's a good mining system; there's no doubt about it, but at that time it was dangerous. And I don't think it's that dangerous now, because I think they watch it more carefully.

OK. But it was more dangerous then, because they didn't watch it carefully, or it was new?

It was probably more dangerous because regulations now would not allow anything like that dangerous situation to occur. In other words, if you were on the ball and kept up with the caving system all the time, there's nothing dangerous about it. But if you didn't, why, then it can be dangerous.

And so somebody wasn't keeping up on it when it collapsed behind you right there.

Yes. You can only do so much, you know. And I'm not criticizing the management; I think the management was very good, but they can only do so much. And they catch up the areas that are the most important first.

Yes. And safety regulations have changed, is that right, over the years?

They have changed tremendously.

We may talk more about that as we go along. Let's go back to that summer then. So you became really aware of how dangerous underground mining was during that summer.

Yes. Very dangerous. Yes, I was very cognizant of this. [laughter] And it was sometimes dangerous from a rather humorous standpoint. Remember, these trains were operated electrically, and you had trolley wire above, on the back, and if you were working in an area that is moving down—that is, the ground is giving slowly, the back is coming down—why, when you're walking along there, your ear may be kind of close to that hot trolley wire. And I forget what it was, but it was at least 250 volts. It was a DC, direct current. And I can recall many times a man would be walking along with a bar, an iron bar, over his shoulders, and all of a sudden that would hit the trolley wire and give him quite a jolt! [laughter] It was more humorous that way than anything else. [laughter] Humorous to those that are standing by, at least. But . . . [laughter]

But not to the person who got the jolt, huh?
[laughter]

To the person who got the jolt, I know of no instances where anybody was killed or even hurt that way. But I do know that almost everybody got shocked at some time or other. An electric shock of that nature is sort of a terrifying experience. You are really shocked.

Did you get a shock? Do you remember it?

Oh, yes, many times, yes. I recall one time my ear hit the wire, and I momentarily passed out, but I caught myself just before I fell. [laughter] But it was just a part of life, and no one paid much attention to it.

It was quite an experience for a young man.

Yes. Yes, it is.

You would have only been about eighteen or so at that time, nineteen?

I was not quite eighteen. I'm a little hesitant to say, "not quite eighteen." That's correct, but they had to stretch a point or two to allow me underground, because . . . I don't know what it is nowadays, but at that time you could not go underground if you were under eighteen. But my birthday was coming up, so they let me go.

And you were a high school graduate in college, so were you ahead of some other eighteen-year-olds, for example, in terms of education?

Yes. That's correct.

OK. What else did you experience from that summer at Ruth, Nevada? Any other impressions about mining?

Well, the most impressing thing I noticed was, if you're in a stormy area or a stormy season (and the Ely area is a stormy area), you go underground, and you don't know what it's going to be like when you come out. You might be surprised in the snow or the snow flurries or something like that when you're coming out. It's always such a surprise when you come out into the daylight to see what's going on.

Because you're so isolated while you're under there?

Absolutely. You're underground; you're working under electric and your carbide lights. At that time carbide lights were all we used, besides the electric lights that were hooked to the regular electric system when you're underground.

So you didn't experience normal daylight; you didn't have temperatures from the outside.

You have no idea what the temperature is. The temperature is always the same underground. Of course, in one way, that's the nice thing about working underground, particularly in the winter—it's always warm underground. [laughter]

Yes. And you can't hear if there's thunder storms or any of the sounds of weather, so . . .

You're completely isolated from the outside.

It's a whole different world underground.

That's right. And, of course, that was my first time working underground, so it really impressed me.

Was that experience part of your deciding to go into that particular career?

It was *because* of that experience, as well as the friends that I developed about that time, that I decided that I would go into mining. It was interesting to me; it was very interesting. And I recall so distinctly that I was so interested in the mining method we were using and how it was all done, that I wrote several letters to a friend of mine here in Reno, with the idea that there would be some sort of chronicle of what I had been doing. Instead of a diary, it was in the form of letters to my friend.

And you wrote down that whole caving process?

Yes. Yes.

Do you have those letters now?

Unfortunately, I do not. I never retrieved those.

But it really made an impression?

Oh, it did.

When you talk about the friends that you made, were they friends that you made while you were mining, or friends that you were talking about from the university? You said that had an influence.

Well, they were friends from the university, I guess, that were also in mining. Well, they were from the university, but they were there at that mine at that time. One example is Paul Gemmill, who was executive secretary of the Nevada Mining Association for many years. I met him, and I recall distinctly, on a Fourth of July vacation that we had, there were three or four of us who decided to go up to the Lehman Caves area, which was, of course, close to Ely. And we slept out overnight there, you know, bonfire, and so forth. And I recall Paul Gemmill at the . . . all of us in the firelight of a bonfire, him reciting "The Cremation of Dan Magee." [laughter] And that was so interesting to me. It had nothing to do with mining, of course, but that was interesting!

[laughter] But that was the entertainment for the evening?

Yes, that's right.

Yes. Is that something that he made up, or is that actually . . .

Oh, no, it's Robert Service's poem on the cremation of Dan Magee. I think that's right. I think I may have the name a little wrong. [Note: The actual title is "The Cremation of Sam McGee."] Oddly enough, that same trip, why, we went up to the Lehman Caves. The Lehman Caves at that time were known to exist, of course, and they'd been looked at quite a bit. And that was just before the park service officially took them over. And a ranger with the park service there took us

through the Lehman Caves and explained that they were not open; they were not even officially part of the park service yet, but he was there, and he might as well show us around, give him a little experience in explaining the caves to others. So we were very fortunate to have that.

That was lucky to be able to see that.

It was very fortunate.

When that summer was over, did you come back and change your course of study based on that experience, or were you already on the right track?

You're already on the right track automatically, because the first two years of college, engineering are the same. They're basic courses, so there were no changes to be made, except Well, that was before my sophomore year, you see, so there were no changes to be made until you start your junior year.

OK, but then, was that different? Mining engineering? Was that different than civil engineering, which is how you started?

Oh, yes. Of course, when you get into your junior year, you start taking some mining and metallurgy courses, which, of course, you would not do in civil engineering.

What were some of the courses that the university offered for mining engineers at that point?

Well, Jay Carpenter had courses on what he called mining engineering, in which we took notes in his lectures on various mining methods and the costs of mining and so forth. And there were metallurgy courses, which started out with lectures on various types of metallurgy; ended up with the

laboratory courses in engineering. Of course, at that time, why, assaying and surveying were a definite part of mining engineering. Of course, the surveying would also be part of civil engineering. And now they don't seem to be stressed very much, particularly assaying. But anyway, those are some of the courses.

OK. And that was offered in your junior year or your junior and senior years?

Junior and senior year.

Is what's offered now changed from when you took . . . ?

The assaying has been dropped. No, many of the courses are much the same, except there's a little more specialization now. Metallurgists are metallurgists. At that time a mining engineer's courses were about equally divided between mining, metallurgy, and geology. Fact is, I took more geology courses in my first four years than the average geologist does now. It just sort of turned out that way.

And that shows how much it's become more specialized? You had a broader range of courses?

Yes. That's right

So that you could go into any of those areas, or you could know a little bit about all of those areas?

I should clarify that a little bit. See, I took more geology, actually, than a geologist would have taken at that time his first four years.

By choice, because you were interested in it?

By choice, that's right. It was by choice, as well as the curriculum. But you had a lot of electives, and my objective was to spread it pretty well evenly between mining, metallurgy, and geology.

OK. Were you learning about new technologies as you went through these courses? Were mining, metallurgy, milling—any of those processes changing at the time you were going through school?

Not much. They were not changing very much. However, keep in mind that flotation was relatively new at that time. It came into being in the very late 1920s or early 1930s. And so that technical change was important in the metallurgical end of my university career.

OK. So the flotation process of milling was being taught.

That's right. Oh, very definitely, stressed very heavily, but they also stressed the older methods, which might be very applicable.

And some of those were?

Amalgamation and gravity concentration.

So those were still being taught, because they were still workable?

Oh, yes, still being explained, you know.

But the flotation was the new thing on the scene.

Yes, yes. That's right.

Anything else that was new that was being taught? This doesn't sound like it was a time for big changes in the mining industry then.

No, it was not. Nowadays there are a lot of relatively new ideas coming in. Of course, cyanidation was being used That was also being stressed, you know.

That was already in use when you were in school?

Oh, cyanidation is a very old method. That goes back to about 1910.

While you were finishing your schooling, did you continue to work in the summers in the mining industry?

Very definitely.

What other jobs did you have while you were in school?

Well, my first summer, of course, was the freshman year, which I mentioned at Ely.

Yes.

After my sophomore year, I ended up having a job with a small gold-mining company near Bishop. And that's where I met Gerry Hartley.

And he's the friend that you mentioned?

Yes. Yes, that is correct. Yes, I knew him beforehand, but I didn't know him very well. School was out, and he was getting ready to go back to this mine out of Bishop. And I was going to go out to work for a quicksilver mine—B & B Quick, actually, on Montgomery Pass on the way to Bishop. So I said, "Well, you might as well come with me," and then ended up, I took him directly to the mine. And his dad, who was the operator there, was there, and one thing led to another, and I ended up working there instead of going to the B & B Quick. So,

unfortunately, I have never been to the B & B Quick. [laughter]

What kind of work did you do that summer after your sophomore year?

Well, we were sinking a shaft there. And I was one of the people taking care of the compressors and other equipment on the surface, so that the pumps could keep going and the men could continue working in the shaft. It was a very small operation, and it had its many difficulties, but, of course, those difficulties meant I learned more about what could or could not be done.

Can you tell me a little bit about what those difficulties were and what you learned?

The pumping, of course, was the biggest problem. And the suction pump on the big Cameron pump, the suction line continually moved, and here was the problem: this would rub on the timbers, and, therefore, the suction line would wear a hole in itself. Of course, that would stop the operation. So we finally ended up wrapping the suction line with rope. I remember so distinctly going to town (and by the way, I also drove the truck to get supplies). I went into town to get some dynamite, and I think it was a half-ton of dynamite. And this rope, I think, was 150 feet of rope. Well, I had put the dynamite on. I wanted to tie the dynamite down. So how does one tie the dynamite down with 150 feet of rope you just got without cutting it? You just got too much. Well, anyway, I did it, and I learned a few things about handling rope. [laughter] And, of course, how to handle the rope without the necessity of cutting it into small pieces.

Anyway, here I was; I brought back to camp a half ton of dynamite, other supplies, as well as 150 feet of rope to wrap the suction of the Cameron pump. The Cameron pump is operated by compressed air. And, of course, we had the problem of

always keeping the compressors going, and they were not very good They were not modern compressors by any means. They were off-breeds. We had plenty of problems with them. Our power was with single-cylinder engines. Hoisting was done by a four-cylinder Novo hoist, which is the only, more-modern piece of equipment that we had there. But, anyway, one way or another we worked it out, and

Can I ask, when you decided to wrap the suction pipe with rope, how did you arrive at that solution? Was it something that somebody else had already tried, or was it something that you all came up with together? Do you recall?

It was just the logical solution. You had to protect it with something, and rope would be a very good protector. It would last through more rubbing. So it was just sort of a logical step that would I don't know if anybody ever did it before or not. Didn't make any difference, because it was just logical. [laughter]

Just logical, but that's the kind of thing that you had to come up with to make this project work and to keep the equipment operating and so on.

Oh, yes.

And you thought that was a good learning process for you to see?

Yes, it was a pretty good learning process, yes. [laughter] This was a 300-foot shaft. We were sinking it to the 400-foot level and branching out from there. We were going to, anyway. We did run into a little bit of ore at the 400, however, not enough to make much difference. That was hoisted to the surface and was sort of kept by itself, and I understand later someone put up a small

mill and milled that ore. I kind of wonder if they ever made anything out of it.

But there were several little innovations we used, such as developing a water system for the change house. Having several miners around, you have to put up a change house, which we built for changing clothes, showers, and so forth. When you come up from underground, you've got to have a hot shower. For one thing, a man coming out of the shaft is cold. As soon as he hits the outside air, he's cold. He's comfortable underground where it's warm, but when he gets out, the cold blast of air hit him pretty bad . . . got to get into the change house right away and get a hot shower. So we devised various methods for our water system there by burying a couple of large oil drums. These were not fifty-five-gallon drums; they were much larger than that. Anyway, little things like that were done.

What was the water supply there? Did you carry it in?

We had to haul water in.

So that was the summer between your sophomore and junior year?

No, it was the summer after my sophomore year, because I stayed there beyond the beginning of the year, and I did not go back to school. I had a job there, and I thought I'd stay and earn enough money so that I'd have something to go back on when I did go back. Well, that job played out though, and I went on to other work.

So you took a little break in schooling between sophomore and junior year?

Yes, yes, I did.

How long a break?

Yes, that was only one year. Then, after my junior year, I stayed out again, and that break was, I believe, for five and a half years.

Was it economics? Was it financial necessity?

Yes, strictly economics.

Did it have to do with the Depression years, because you would have been in that . . . ?

Yes, it was in that time.

It was hard to get the money to go school.

Oh, yes. After all, you know, I was earning five dollars a day on most of these jobs. Yes, my first job out of school when I graduated, I was getting six dollars a shift. [laughter]

Not a big increase, was it, for all that education? [laughter] So during this year off, what else did you do besides that job with your friend Gerry?

Well, I went to northern California, and I had a job with a placer operation, a company that was in the process of rehabilitating an old hydraulic mine. And I worked at that for several months; I don't know just how long. And then I believe . . . Yes, I came back to school then, and I did finish my junior year.

Junior year, yes. And about what year is this then? About 1933?

No. My junior year was the year of 1931-1932.

And then you took a five-year break?

Then after that, I was out of school for quite a while. About a year or year and a half or something like that was spent working for

the highway department, Nevada State Highway Department, on their planning survey division, I guess, wherein I had the opportunity to go around much of the state making rough Brunton odometer surveys of all the, you might say, tertiary roads and trails in the state.

So you got to know Nevada pretty well during that time.

Yes, that really gave me a good chance to get acquainted with Nevada. I really appreciated that job, because I spent quite a bit of that time in southern Nevada and then after that went into northern Nevada. Remember, this was before the days of the four-wheel drive, let's say before four-wheel drives were common. One must remember that later there were four-wheel drives in World War II called FWDs, as I remember. Anyway, I worked for them for at least a year and a half or something like that. And it was during that time, oh, that there were many small jobs that I worked on, very many, and they were short duration. At that time you were very lucky to get a job, and you grabbed it.

Jobs were hard to find during the Depression?

Yes, that's right. That was the latter part of the Depression.

Did you get any more mining experience during that time that you were away?

Oh, at the hydraulic mine, I learned a little bit there.

After the highway department, did you . . . ?

No. There was no mining experience there whatsoever, except as to where some of the mines were and some of the old camps that were around, you know. That's all.

So that five-year break was really about surviving the Depression.

Oh, that's all.

Yes. Then, when you could go back to school, what year was that?

Well, let's go back to the highway department. I had certain vacation time coming from the highway department, and I got a job using that vacation time surveying some mining claims out of Winnemucca at a mercury mine referred to as the McCoy . . . no, not McCoy. Anyway, at a mercury mine about sixty miles or so northwest of Winnemucca. And that gave me enough money so that, when next semester of school started, which was January of 1938, I went back to school.

By the way, during the latter part of my highway department experience, I was married. And between the \$265 that I saved up from the survey job and my wife working, I was able to go back to school. And I went to school then for the year of 1938. In other words, I started in what you might call spring—actually it's winter—January of 1938, and I finished December of 1938. And that summer of 1938 I worked on various jobs, and part of it was doing some surveying with the Soil Conservation Service out of Yerington.

I might add that during that five-and-a-half-year period that I mentioned previously, I did work . . . Oh, that was the time when we had the WPA and whatever. There, one project was laying out some triangulation survey grids in the state of Nevada, and I got involved with that. And, in fact, oddly enough, my surveying experience that I picked up helped me a great deal getting jobs here and there.

Although you weren't getting direct mining experience, you were getting the kind of

experience that was so valuable to you later.

Well, it was indirect. Yes. That's right. It helped later on. And then from that WPA job, we went to the Leviathan sulfur mine, and that's about thirty miles due south of Gardnerville. And I worked there for several months.

And that was before you went back for your senior year?

Yes, that was before I went to the highway department. I guess the highway department came after that, yes.

So you graduated in 1938.

Christmas or . . . well, December of 1938.

December of 1938. You had a wife. Did you have children yet?

No children.

No. But a wife, so you were no longer a single man. You had responsibilities.

Thank goodness my wife helped me get back to school. She helped me a lot, all the time, going to school.

Or it might not have been possible?

Yes, it would have been very difficult.

Yes. What kind of work did she do that helped you through school?

She spent most of her time working in a jewelry store, a clerk, bookkeeping, and stuff like that.

OK. What happened when you were a senior? Did you go right to work in mining

when you were finished? When you graduated, did you have a job?

When I graduated, I went directly to the Cord Mill at Silver Peak.

Tell me the story of how that came about. How did you get that job?

Well, in December of 1938, before the school year was over, why, S. Power Warren came to talk to us at what we called the Crucible Club at that time—a club of mining engineers, so to speak.

On campus? Is that where it was?

Oh, yes, students. S. Power Warren came to talk with the students there. And I knew that he was starting this mill there, so I talked to him about a job, being as how I had had milling experience previously. And he said, "Sure, that's fine."

And who was S. Power Warren? Was he a significant person?

Yes, he was a fairly well-known metallurgist from Denver, and, I guess, he had a pretty fair reputation. He possibly did some teaching at the Colorado School of Mines—I think he did. But, anyway, he had some kind of ties in the Colorado School of Mines.

And he also had ties with the Cord Mill in Silver Peak?

He was the designer, and I guess you'd say the mill superintendent.

OK. And so you asked him for a job, and he said he had one for you.

Yes, right. He was certainly looking for people that had had cyaniding experience.

OK. Now, let's backtrack just a minute. Where did you get your cyaniding experience? I'm not sure I picked that up.

The reason you didn't pick it up is because I forgot to mention it.

OK. [laughter] Let's go back and get that.

Yes, well, we'll go back a little bit farther than that. In the summer of 1933, I was doing whatever I could, wherever I could, and I was working on a truck, and due to an accident, I had a very serious gash on my left eye. That was September of 1933, and then for a couple of months I was hospitalized one way or another—not actually in the hospital, but I was under medical care and could do nothing. And then about February of 1934, another one of these short jobs came along, and several of us that had known each other in school got a job about forty-five miles east of Tonopah sampling a silver mine up there—the Longstreet Mine.

Named after Jack Longstreet [famous Nevada frontiersman]?

That's right. That's who it was named after, yes. And I worked there. That helped out a little bit financially. And then, right after that, I got a job at the Silverado Mill south of Wellington near the state line. And that's where I got my cyaniding experience.

Was that your first experience in a mill rather than in the mining process?

That was my first milling experience out there, yes.

And was that quite a bit different from anything else that you had experienced—the cyanidation process?

I had no experience in cyaniding before that. Fact is, I know very little about any

other type of milling. I've had no experience in other types of milling. Well, that's where I learned something about cyaniding.

So that gave you the experience to get the job after you graduated then? And you worked just several months in that mill outside of Wellington?

It was after the Longstreet Mine sampling job that three of us that had known each other in school (and we also happened to work on the sampling job), we all got work at the Leviathan sulfur mine. And that would have been the spring of 1934. And we worked there for several months. I believe the mine shut down for a while or shut down entirely, I guess, was the reason we finally left. That would have been in 1934. Leviathan—about thirty miles south of Gardnerville. It's west of Highway 395.

OK. So you went there before you went to Wellington, and the Leviathan came first.

Yes, I think it was after that that I went to the Silverado Mine south of Wellington.

And that's where you got your milling experience, cyanidation experience.

Yes, that's right.

Will you compare the two? Did you like the milling experience compared to your mining experience? Did you have a preference at that point?

I don't think so. It just so happened that that's what was available.

All right. Let's talk about Silver Peak. You got the job, went there after you graduated.

No, no. I'm going to lose something if . . . I'm in 1934 now. Yes. And in 1935 is when I went to work for the highway

department. The latter part of 1935, I guess just about all of 1936. As far as I know, it was also 1937 there.

That sounds about right, because then you went to the mercury mine and then back to school, right?

Yes, that's right. I think that pretty well fits. OK, I went back to school and finished school, and then I went to Silver Peak.

And did you go there alone? Were you hired to go there alone, or did Mr. Warren hire more than just one person in that class?

Oh, he hired others, I believe. He hired Gerry Hartley for one thing. I think he and I went there together, because Gerry wouldn't have had any trouble at all getting a job with them, because Gerry had lots of milling experience.

He had more milling experience than you did?

Yes, a lot more than I did. So I'm sure that . . . yes, we went there together. We roomed together, and . . .

Where did you room? Tell me about living conditions there.

Well, they had some tent houses set up along that . . . The road there by the mill is right on a ridge, and tent houses were on the north side of this more or less east-west ridge. And they were very simple and very common in those days.

Did they have a wood foundation?

Yes, they had a wood foundation and wood floor.

OK. And how many men to a tent?

Two or one.

So you and Gerry roomed together?

Yes, Gerry and I roomed together, and we worked together.

Where did you take your meals? Where did you get your food?

We must have had our meals at a boardinghouse right there. There was some kind of a facility right there, and I can't recall right now what it was. But I know we didn't have to go any distance at all. It was all in walking distance. It was not up at the mine, because I have never actually been at the Silver Peak mine itself, the Mary Mine.

What was your first job there at the E.L. Cord Mill?

The first job I had, which is actually the only job I had, was what they referred to at that time as "solution man." In other words, I took care of the cyanidation process. I had nothing to do with the actual milling. By milling, I mean the grinding of the ore. And that was usually the way that was handled in those days. One man in a mill would handle the grinding part and possibly the flotation with it, and another man would handle all that was involved in cyanidation.

Tell me, how many men did it take to run this mill per shift?

Two.

Just two?

Yes.

That's all. And you went twenty-four hours a day, though?

Oh, yes. Three shifts ran the mill. The operation would be going continuously, seven days a week.

What were the shifts? Do you remember what times?

Well, ordinarily they were 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., 3:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m., 11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. Or it might be 8:00 to 4:00, 4:00 to 12:00, 12:00 to 8:00. I don't recall right there, but it was one of those.

OK. And did you end up on every shift during your time there because of the rotation?

Yes, we rotated shifts every two weeks.

OK. So how many total men were there in the area where you lived who worked just the mill, would you say?

Well, just in the mill, it would have a . . . let's see. Well, you have to keep in mind, there are two men in direct contact to the operation. Sometimes there would be another man on that shift from whatever. And also, there is a mill foreman that is around all during day shift and possibly into the afternoon shift, as well, sometimes. That's about what you would have for the actual operation.

But in so far as the housing in that area, why, as I recall, there were a few men living near the mill that were also involved with the mine. There was an accountant there that I believe lived in that particular area. And there was another engineer; I forget what he was doing, but he also was in that area. There were a few more than the number to actually run the mill. To say that it takes about ten to fifteen men or ten to twelve, or something like that, would be about right to operate that mill continuously.

And then, that allows for rotation and everything.

Oh, yes.

So it's really not a very large number.

No, a small, small number.

And so your job was the cyanidation process. Could you describe to me what you would do during a shift for that job?

You would make sure that your cyanide solution was at the proper level in the tanks and that the sands in the tanks were properly being discharged from one and going into the other. And there was quite a bit of checking of the valves there to make sure that the solution was going to the proper place in the proper quantity. And I recall that all the pumps (they were very good, small centrifugal pumps) were on the lower level. And you're talking about something that's about like a three-story building, and so it took young men, rather agile, to operate this, because they'd be running from the top to the bottom quite frequently.

Between checking gauges and checking their pumps and . . . ?

Yes. Yes, it's quite a little moving back and forth.

OK. Was it possible to take any breaks during that time, or when you were on the shift were you working the whole time watching all of this?

You're on the whole time. You don't consider breaks in this business, because actually if everything's going right, that's your break. You really don't have to do anything—just stand there and watch things. That's all.

Just monitor. What if things aren't going right? What can go wrong, and what does it involve?

If things are not going right, why, you might have too much solution in one particular place. You might have some sand spills. Then you'd be moving rather fast.

To correct the problem?

Yes. Turn off pumps, turn on pumps, and regulate them. These pumps are, as I mentioned, they were small, centrifugal pumps and very good, because you could turn the valves off against the centrifugal pump; that makes no difference whatsoever. Or you can turn the valve half on, and you can control it very well. That was very good equipment there in that mill.

Was this all new equipment, could you tell?

Yes, it was. Well, practically all of it was brand-new. I'm sure that the grinding unit came from some other place. I know that the classifier . . . we had a large, what we called a "rake bowl classifier." That came from Weepah. And as is very common in the mineral industry, sometimes you have to cut things in half and put them back together again. And that's just what they did to this classifier: they had to cut it with a torch, cut it more or less in half, and then welded it back together again at the mill.

In order to move it?

To move it, [they] had to cut it. Yes, you cut it to move it, and then you weld it back after all the pieces are in the proper place. I recall hearing recently about a tractor, a Caterpillar tractor, being cut up that way and put back together again underground in a stope.

So that's a practice that's still going on . . .

Yes, right.

. . . in order to make things mobile.

Not very frequently with a tractor, but, yes, anyway, it is done frequently.

Do you want to kind of talk us through the entire process of the E.L. Cord Mill? Now, when you were there, it was called the Prescott Lease Mill. Is that correct?

Yes, it was. Actually, it was called the Prescott Lease. The operation was called the Prescott Lease, although the mill itself was commonly referred to as the Cord Mill. Why, I don't know.

OK. What does that mean, the Prescott Lease? Was somebody leasing the mill from Cord, or how does that work?

I have an idea that the operation was a lease from the owners of the property, and, therefore, it was called the Prescott Lease. And, I think, Prescott in this case was the name of a man and had no connection with Prescott, Arizona. And the Prescott Lease, of course, would be including the mine as well as the mill.

So, where the ore was coming from was also part of the same operation at that point.

Yes, yes.

That was the company running it.

Don't let me give you the impression that the mill was actually a lease. The mill was not a lease, but the mine would be a lease, and, therefore, the mill was built for the Prescott Lease.

OK. Would you talk us through that [milling] process? We've got a flow sheet . . .

Yes. This flow sheet is excellent so far as . . . it's rather brief, but it gives me a pretty good idea as to what I actually did. Of course, the ore goes through the mill, the grinding unit, and from there it went through the flotation process.

And tell me what that was.

The flotation process, where certain oils are added to the pulp, and the pulp is then run through rectangular tanks, and by the addition of air at the bottom, causing quite a few bubbles, why, the mineral which you are trying to float adheres to the bubbles, comes to the top, and floats over the side of the tank, and it's collected. And, of course, this is a rather involved process requiring rather special attention to the feeding of these special oils. And then the concentrate itself here went through the cyanide process.

After the bubbles took the mineral, the froth (concentrate) went through the cyanide process?

Yes, that's correct. And this cyanide process was entirely separate from the rest . . . from the sand leaching that went on just below that.

Was that usual? Because the cyanide process had been in use now for twenty years, almost thirty years or so. So was this the usual method, or was this something new?

No. No. The cyanidation of concentrates was rather new, because they sometimes are difficult to cyanide. And in this particular case, though, it worked. Keep in mind that the part of the crushed ore that went through the flotation process was the

finer or the slimes. But the sands went directly to the lower part of the mill, which was the sand-leaching part. There were six tanks there. And the sands first went to the upper three tanks and through a distribution system, which is rather unique and very old, though. The sands were distributed evenly in the tanks and leached there by the addition of cyanide solution, which was drawn off the bottom. Then after a certain length of time, being two or three days, why, the cyanide solution would be drained out of that tank; the sands would be sluiced from that tank to a lower set of tanks. And by doing this, the sands are aerated—they are put in a different position in the tanks to get away from the possibility of channeling in the sands. It was a unique method of sand leaching. And I had never heard of it before, and I don't know that it's been used very much, but apparently it was an idea that S. Power Warren came up with. And I think it was a good idea.

And the result of that was a more even distribution of the cyanide? Is that what you're saying?

Well, it gives you a better distribution. The cyanide is distributed evenly in one tank, but then there's always a possibility of channeling, and by moving the sand again to another tank, you get away from this. You put the sand grains in a different position than they were before.

Which distributes them more evenly?

Yes.

Plus, did you say something about adding oxygen which helps?

Yes. It adds oxygen, which is necessary for the cyanide process, and that helped a great deal.

There was one peculiar thing about that system, though. Because of this continual sluicing of sands from one tank to another, you put a lot of cyanide into the atmosphere. And we always noticed that when we were working there. That quantity is not poisonous, but it was a little bit objectionable.

Odor? Is there an odor?

Yes, it's a slight odor.

Yes. But it didn't have any impact on your health that you could tell?

Oh, no. No, it was really not a health hazard. That part there was not a health hazard whatsoever. No. It's not hydrocyanic acid which kills people. But we noticed that there was quite a little . . . well, it would be a humid atmosphere with a lot of cyanide, actually, that you're breathing the solution. But you're not breathing enough of it to do you any harm that we could tell.

You felt the same; you didn't have any ill effects?

Oh, yes. Yes.

Just didn't smell good.

Yes. It's just an example that the human body was actually taking in cyanide solution but not enough to do any harm.

Were there any safety measures that you had to follow? For example, did you have to wear any kind of a face mask to protect you from that or . . . ?

No, no. No. No, that would be impossible, because you'd be wearing this continuously, all the time and under great physical exertion, and it wouldn't be practical. And it really wasn't necessary at

all. No, there was no problem there with that.

This kind of takes us into a little side trip here, but were there other safety measures that you did have to follow while working on that? Hard hat or steel-toed shoes, any of those things?

No. At that time hard hats were, as I recall, not necessary in the mill. In those days, though, hard hats were definitely necessary underground. In the mine, but not in the mill. However, there is so little [that] can go wrong that there is no safety measure that I can think of, except for ventilation. You had to keep in mind that you needed good ventilation in a place like that.

And was this particular mill set up with good ventilation?

Yes, it was. It was. But, in going a little bit farther in the process, I'll explain to you where there is a hazard, and it did cause some trouble there. The cyanide solutions, what we call the pregnant solutions that carry the gold, go through a precipitation process. It's a bag precipitator, wherein zinc is combined with the cyanide solution; then the gold replaces the zinc and forms a black sludge that contains the gold values. This black sludge or precipitate is then dried and then put through a furnace to melt down the bullion. At this particular mill, to dry the sludge or to dry the precipitate, they used drying pans, wherein the precipitate was put in rather large, flat pans with heat underneath the pans to heat the precipitates and drive out the water or cyanide solution—evaporate the water.

Now, what's dangerous here is that you're dealing with zinc precipitates, and when you heat zinc, you put off zinc fumes, which are poisonous to the body. And at one particular time, why, there was something

wrong with the ventilation or something wrong They got too much heat under the zinc precipitates. Anyway, the fumes were extreme in the mill, and everybody in the mill became sick. And the sickness was . . . I think, it was a combination of diarrhea and vomiting, yes. And it just so happened that I was lucky—that happened when I was off on a long break, and I was out of the mill. And when I came back, I heard about it, and it was unfortunate that everybody was sick. And the company took very good care of everybody and brought in medical help immediately. And it was just a matter of taking proper medicines to counteract this, and it was taken care of rather rapidly. But it just gives you an example of what can happen if some little thing goes wrong.

Did they have to shut down during that time when everybody got sick?

No, I don't believe they did.

They just got some ventilation in there, kept it going.

Yes, increased the ventilation, yes. Those that could, kept working; that's all.

OK. And when you said they brought in medical help, do you know, was it a company doctor, or did they bring in a doctor or just medicine? Do you recall?

No, they brought in help. They consulted medical people to find out what could be done. After all, Silver Peak's quite a ways from any real medical help in Tonopah.

Right. Tonopah would have probably been the closest?

It would have been the closest, in Tonopah. Not at all times did you have good

medical help in Tonopah. Tonopah very frequently has problems having a doctor there.

So that was, to your knowledge, the only danger that ever arose at the mill while you were there—lack of ventilation?

That's all. Yes.

Is there more that you want to say about the process? You've described this method of moving from one cyanidation tank to another. That was unusual; you had not seen that before.

That was new to me, to transfer sands from one tank to another.

The rest of the process was similar . . .

Yes, very. Except that large-scale sand leaching, as this one was, was not done commonly in those days. Sand leaching is an old, old cyanide process that had been used for many years and was very common in the very early part of the century. But it was not common in the 1930s and 1940s.

So this was one of the few mills that had that process?

That's correct, yes.

Were you aware of any others? Do you know how many existed about that time?

No, I don't, no. Ordinarily, in the cyanide process, the ore is ground to a finer state, and then goes through a, what we call, "counter current decantation cyanide process," where everything is in pulp form. There are no sands. You're not handling anything in sand. Everything is ground finer or is handled in pulp form.

OK. Why was it that the process with sand leaching worked here? Was there something about the ore that was coming out of that area, or it just happened to be the particular technology?

I believe that S. Power Warren must have made . . . obviously, he made many tests on the ore, and he must have decided that he could get the values out of the ore without grinding it so fine. Therefore, he saved quite a bit of money grinding, and it worked just as well.

I see. So then with that combination, it was a financial savings to the company to put those particular processes together.

Yes.

Where in other areas, they might not have been able to get the value out of the ore without grinding it.

That's correct. Yes. Apparently, the ore was such that the values were in the cleavages, you might say, so that very little grinding would release the ore. Just as today, why, we're doing a lot of heap leaching, wherein, if the ore is merely crushed, the cyanide solutions can permeate the cracks in the rock and thereby remove the values. Much the same general idea, but here we used the sand-leaching system.

A great deal of testing is done before a mill is built. And the nature of the ore, the nature of the way the mineralization occurs in the rock, will determine the metallurgical



“Sand leaching is an old, old cyanide process that had been used for many years and was very common in the very early part of the century. But it was not common in the 1930s and 1940s.” The Cord Mill, Silver Peak, Nevada. (Photograph courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society, Acc. # ESM 823.)

process you use to get the gold out of the rock. And, of course, nowadays we do a tremendous amount of research that way, and because of this, we came up with the heap-leaching process, whereby we could get practically all the values out without any fine crushing at all.

Which is why we no longer see the mills like they were built before. You have the leaching pads instead, because the crushing is just . . . you don't require as much.

Yes. That's right. You don't require quite as much crushing. However, in other places you may and, therefore, use the same, more common system.

OK. Even so, you'd never seen that transfer from one cyanide tank to another. You haven't seen it since?

I have never seen it before or after, and I just wish I knew a little bit more about what the actual results were, but I have no idea.

But you do know that that was different than anything at that time.

It was absolutely different. Yes, the transfer idea was different.

And as far as you knew at the time that the Prescott Lease mill was operating, were there other cyanidation mills operating in Nevada? Were you aware of others in Nevada?

Oh, yes. The cyanide process was all over the state. Fact is, there were two other mills right in Silver Peak using the cyanide process. And I guess the one . . . there was a mill west of Silver Peak, the Sunshine Mine was operating there. I don't know anything about that mill.

That came later, did it, than the . . . ?

Yes, well, that was there at the time I was, but . . . no, I wouldn't say it was later than the Cord Mill. It was probably there before the Cord Mill. But these other two smaller cyanide mills in Silver Peak were there long before the Cord Mill. They may be there now. [laughter]

In fact, one of them . . . parts of it are still there within Cyprus Foote Mineral lithium plant.

Oh?

Yes. It's all in that area now, so you can see some remains of where that mill was. But there are some timbers and things that still exist that became part of this whole different [lithium] processing. Those cyanide mills in Silver Peak are gone.

Oh, they are?

Yes. They don't exist anymore.

One was the Chiatovich.

That was the first one, correct, in Nevada?

I don't know. But I don't really know when the lithium mill was put in, but that would have been . . .

That came in the 1960s.

That's when I was gone; I was not in the state then.

You weren't in Nevada then?

Yes.

Let's go back to your time then at the mill. So you were working seven days a week?

Yes, seven days a week, eight-hour shift. And you had some time off, of course. If you were on afternoon shift, as an example, you'd have practically most of the day to yourself, you know. And Gerry and I would go out and look around the area somewhat. We were very much interested in visiting the crater which appears in practically all the pictures of that area. And then, it so happened that when Gerry Hartley was a very young man, why, his father operated a lead-silver mine—I believe it was called the Harmel or Hammel or something like that—not too far out of Silver Peak. We went over there to visit that little property. And oddly enough, a picture of that operation, of that little mine, was passed out by the Central Nevada Historical Society just recently.

And so you got to see it again.

Yes.

It was taken about the time you were there, was it? It looked like the same . . .

Probably. Oh, no, no. The picture was probably taken during the operation. Yes. We were there much after the operation, probably in the 1920s.

And we visited the Sunshine Mine and went underground there to see what they were doing.

What were they doing there?

All I remember about it is that they were using a shrink-stope system, which is very common. But the young man that was mining engineer there had got his training at Boston, one of the big schools in the East, and he wanted to show us this unique system. And we were surprised to find that it was nothing but common, old, shrink system, which was used all over the state of Nevada.

And what is that?

He was a graduate of MIT, which is a very astute engineering school. But if you want to learn mining, you better go to one of the western schools. [laughter]

Why is that?

Well, because you're right in the vicinity of mining. You're in the area, and you're more apt to get people that really know something about mining.

The shrink system is very simple. It's where you're working in the stope, you blast the ore down, and the bottom of the stope is attached to a metal chute where you draw the ore out. And you draw up enough . . . just the right amount of ore so that the men can still work in the stope. And they're working *on* the ore; they're standing on the ore with their equipment to drill the ore above them. When they blast, why, then more ore is drawn out to give enough space for men to get back in there again and do more drilling and blasting.

But he was all fascinated with this new system, and it was a commonly used system in Nevada.

Yes, it surprised us, both Gerry and I, that here this young man mentioned this strange system that they were using, and it was what we had used for years and are still using in small mines. [laughter]

OK. What other exploration did you do in your free time around that area?

Oh, that's about it. When we had a small amount of free time, you know, like during the day, why, that was ideal. That's about all we did. However, I must mention that I had an uncle who was a miner, and he happened to be at Silver Peak at that particular time. And so I visited him. And I guess he was

quite a character around the country. He came over here from Austria about the turn of [the] century, and he'd been mining at western camps all over—a typical ten-day miner, you might say.

What is that?

A ten-day miner is one where he stays on a job for a short period of time, and then after a week or two or something like that, he decides that he has a little money in his jeans, he's going to quit and go elsewhere. So that is common; the term "ten-day miner" applies to these particular people. Well, I guess at that time, why, my Uncle Johnny toned down a little bit, and he'd been working there for quite a while. Anyway, it's odd that I visited him at that time, and that's the last time I saw him. It was about five years or six years or so after that, I inquired in Silver Peak and found out that he had died of silicosis at Goldfield.

Did he have any signs of silicosis when you met with him?

He probably did. He had a cough, you know. He was an interesting guy. He was commonly referred to by his cohorts as "Moonshine Johnny." [laughter]

And why did he get that nickname?

I have no idea why As far as I know, he didn't have anything to do with making moonshine, but anyway they referred to him as "Moonshine Johnny." I suppose he was a . . . well, he was a kind of a humorous character, and I found out from someone at Silver Peak several years after that, that his last days, why, he was in the Goldfield hospital with miners dying of silicosis, and he kept the rest of them more or less amused by his stories and antics.

So he was a great storyteller and well liked by the miners.

Yes, apparently.

Yes. You said his name was Johnny? Was his last name Kral? Was it, your father's . . . ?

No, no. His name was Hausmann. He's my mother's brother.

And he came from Austria. Did your mother also come from Austria?

Yes, she did. My mother . . . well, my uncle, too, were born and raised in Vienna.

And did they come over together to the United States?

Oh, no. No, no. My mother came over first, and then I don't know just how it worked, but my mother had had a son in Austria in Vienna. She came over to the United States but left the son in Vienna. And then her brother Johnny came later and brought the son. So my brother, or actually half-brother, was brought to the United States by Johnny, my Uncle Johnny.

And that's the half brother . . . I didn't catch his name, your half brother.

Edward. His name was Brenkuss.

OK. So that was your half brother, that you lived with here in Reno for a while.

Yes, that's the one. That's correct. That's the one that brought me to Reno.

OK. And back to your Uncle Johnny, was that the only time that you'd ever seen him or met him?

No, I had seen him a few times before that. I very seldom saw him. He visited us in the Los Angeles area a few times.

But that was the last time that you saw him alive.

Yes, that's the last time So that was one of the memorable things about that time in Silver Peak, was being able to visit with him.

When we were talking about how I happened to come to Reno, I didn't elaborate very much, and then it's rather interesting in what coincidences can happen. I'll go into that now, because it may be of interest to somebody. Anyway, in about 1925 or 1926 or somewhere along there, I lost track of my brother and had no idea where he was. So I visited his old friends and people that he had worked with in the Los Angeles area. I remember the Cannonball Express was the name of the company. Anyway, I visited them, and I asked if they had any idea where my brother was, and they . . . no, they didn't. They had not heard from him for many years. Well, somebody in that company was traveling in northern California. The same time my brother, I found out later, was a traveling salesman selling candy in northern Nevada and northern California. And either this other party or my brother were stopped on the road. They had tire trouble, and the other party stopped, and in discussing themselves, why, they realized that they knew each other, or that they had connections. And, therefore, this man mentioned to my brother that I had been in the office asking about him. So my brother's wife wrote to my mother in the Los Angeles area. That's how I got the connection. And it was a short time after that, why, I hitch-hiked to Reno . . . and came back here to school.

It's interesting that you had an uncle who was in mining, and that's the life that you chose.

Absolute coincidence. No connection whatsoever. [laughter] It sure is, because as was very common in the days of my youth in the mid-1920s, why, most young people that were engineering-inclined were always thinking of electrical engineering for some reason or other. I know I did. And then I knew I was going to go into some type of engineering. When I came to Nevada, why, it was due to my associations (again) that I decided on civil engineering. And then, again, due to other associations, I have transferred . . . gone into mining. No connection whatsoever with my uncle.

I have one more question about your uncle. Do you know whether he came to the United States to do mining? Was he mining in Austria, or was that simply the work that was available to him once he got here? Do you know that story?

I would say it was simply the work was available to him. Oddly enough, most people, when you mention Austria, would say, "Well, he was probably a miner in Austria, because an awful lot of miners in the United States came from Austria." But my uncle came from Vienna, and coming from the city of Vienna or coming from the outlying areas of Austria are entirely different. For one thing, they don't even speak the same language. The Austrians in the outlying parts of Austria at that time were Slavic people. And when I first went underground and worked underground in the mines, I ran into these Austrians, and I thought they would speak German, the same as I used to speak at home. But, no, they were Slavic people. The mining was in the outlying parts of Austria.

The same country, but a whole different culture, really.

Very different. They were Slavic people.

OK. But you did find that, when you went into the underground mining, when you started here in Nevada, there were lots of people with . . .

Lots of Slavic people that came from Austria.

OK. So that was one of the groups. Were there other [ethnic] groups that you saw when you were out in the mining industry in Nevada?

Not in Nevada, necessarily, but later on, elsewhere in the Midwest, I ran into the people that came from Cornwall, which we commonly refer to as Cousin Jacks. And also the Finlanders. Finnish people were involved in mining quite a bit.

But that was more in the Midwest.

Yes, that was in the Midwest. However, there are lots of Cornish people in western mining. Fact is, they're very common in the Grass Valley area, along the Mother Lode.

OK. Why are they called Cousin Jacks? Do you know where that came from?

I don't know. No.

That's a term that's just used in general for people from Cornwall?

Yes, I have no idea. [laughter] The people of that culture and their interests and their ideas and so forth are very interesting, because they are the ones that came up with the imaginative idea of the little people that live in the mines and [are] commonly referred to as Tommyknockers.

That's a well-known story among miners, right? The little spirits that live in the mines.

Yes, that's right.

Yes. But you laugh when you say that. Is that something that you believed in or don't believe in?

Oh, no! [laughter] No, I don't believe in that at all. But, I think, it interests me tremendously. And in a dinner meeting we had one time of the AIME [American Institute of Mining, Petroleum Engineers], why, one of my cohorts and his wife came up with a program where he was the Tommyknocker. And they put on a pretty good program. [laughter]

So it brings a lot of humor, if nothing else.

Yes, that's right. Yes.

I want to go back to your work at the mill and talk about some of the technical aspects of it a little bit more. Tell me, what was the source of the water supply in the Cord Mill? Do you know where the water came from for that mill? It was pipelines that were already present or . . . ?

I have no idea. A very good question.

But water was not a problem.

No, water was no problem.

OK. What about living conditions? Was water also available to you in your tents and so on, or did it go directly to the mill?

We must have had some shower facilities somewhere, and I have an idea we had our shower facilities in the mill. But there was water somewhere available to us,

but we did not have running water in the tents.

So it sounds like maybe the water just went to the mill, and then . . .

I suppose they used outhouses there for the tents. If you wanted water in your tent, you carried it there. But I would think that the shower facilities were probably in the mill. I don't really recall that. There are a few gaps there in my memory.

What about transportation? You said everything was within walking distance while you were there. Did you have a vehicle there with you?

Oh, yes. Yes, I had my own vehicle there.

Do you remember what you were driving at the time?

Yes, a 1936 Pontiac. [laughter]

OK. It could make it up that hill? That's a pretty steep hill.

Oh, yes. Yes, to the mill I didn't think was much of a hill.

Wasn't that bad. And what about the transportation that was used in the work, getting the ore from the mine to the mill? How was that done? Do you remember that? Am I asking you all the wrong questions? [laughter]

You've asked me the wrong question there, because this had been bothering me for a long time, ever since you first mentioned that property. I can't recall how the ore got to the mill. And this is something that I've got to talk to Gerry about, and I mentioned it to a lady there where he lives

that I've got to talk to him about something; that's one of the questions . . .

So maybe we can come back to that.

Yes. I would like to come back to that, because this bothers me. Completely ignorant about how the ore got to the mill.

That's good that we have someone else that you can talk to about it, though. Maybe it'll start to come back when you two visit about it again.

Yes, very fortunate that I have somebody, because, you know, the people that I remember that worked there, they're all dead now.

Yes, because that was in the 1930s.

Yes, 1939. Quite a while ago.

That is quite a while ago, all of a sudden, isn't it? [laughter]

Yes! [laughter]

Do you remember what the pay was to work in that mill?

Yes, six dollars a shift.

A shift, so six dollars a day?

Six dollars a day. And that was pretty fair wages, because I remember my sister-in-law, who was a registered nurse, I was talking to her about this. She said, "Well, that's pretty good. That's what I make." Yes, it was in 1939.

So those were good-paying jobs in 1939?

Yes, yes.

OK. Did that pay include your room in the tent house?

Oh, yes.

Did you pay for your food separately?

I don't know.

Because you had a wife. Was she still living in Reno during that time?

Yes, my wife was in Reno. And on long breaks, why, I would come to Reno.

So if you had two or three days, you could get to Reno and back.

Yes. Yes.

And was the money that you were earning part of what was contributed to the household here?

Yes. Oh, yes. That was our principal income, actually.

OK. She wasn't working at that time?

She was working, but I was earning more than she was by far.

OK. And the six dollars a day, that was more than what people were earning in the mines; is that . . . ?

No.

No. It was the same?

No, in the mine they would be earning about the same.

Was there other prospecting going on in the area, or was it pretty much focused on working the known mines?

No, there was no exploration going on in that area at that time. And the only [other] mining operation going on was the Sunshine. The Mary Mine and the Sunshine was the only thing that actually operated. I don't know about the Chiatovich Mill or if the mill was actually operating then.

Did you spend much time in Silver Peak itself?

No, there was no reason. After all, a place like that, unless you're a barfly, why, then there's no reason that . . .



I want to start today just by asking you a couple of questions from the previous tapes. The first one is, could you explain "changing rooms" and the need for hot showers, both in the mines and the mills?

Well, in both cases, when a man got off shift or finished a shift, well, he was somewhat dirty, and it was necessary for him to clean up. And in all cases the mine supplied shower facilities. Now at the Mary Mine, at the mine itself, there were shower facilities for the men working underground, and at the mill there were shower facilities in the mill for the men when they got off shift in the mill. And, of course, they just took their shower and didn't have to go very far to where they lived.

OK. Was it entirely because they were dirty, or were there some health reasons beyond just being dirty from the work that they were doing?

Well, it was entirely for the fact that a man is filthy when he comes out from underground and when he's working in the mill. Sometimes he's working rather strenuously in a mill. If they have a spill and he has to do a lot of shoveling or something like that. That's the reason that a man just has to have a shower after that work.

OK. I was just wondering if there's any need for the shower because of the changes in temperature. You mentioned earlier that it's warm in the mines, and then they might come out and it would be wintertime and cold. And would that be a health threat to them?

Yes, that's a good reason for a hot shower when you're working underground, because when you're underground the conditions are relatively warm, and in the wintertime, of course, it could be snowing outside. And it's quite important for a man to have a hot shower and sort of rehabilitate himself before he goes out.

Get cleaned up and get his body temperature stabilized and so on. So those were typically provided in both the mines and the mills.

Oh, yes. Everywhere the company provides those.

OK. And since you lived in tents, you didn't have showers in your room.

Oh, no, no.

So this was kind of a community shower area.

Yes, yes. At the mill, the showers were in the mill. At the mine, they would have had what they call a "change house," where you change from your grubby underground clothes to your street clothes and take a shower in between, of course.

OK. Do they have lockers there or somewhere where people could leave their street clothes?

Usually, they have either lockers or some means of hanging up your clothes.

OK. A second question that I have is that we've mentioned several systems that were used in milling, and we need to have a brief description about each of them. Could you go through and tell me about flotation, amalgamation, and gravity concentration?

Flotation became rather important in the late 1920s or early 1930s, and, actually, the original name is froth flotation, whereby certain chemicals and air are added to the pulp, and the air facilitates the formation of bubbles, and the chemicals, of course, promote the bubbles. And the gold and silver minerals adhere to the bubbles. Or it could be copper—gold, silver, copper, or whatever minerals you're after—adhere to the bubbles and rise to the surface, and then they have a means on the machine to scoop that froth off. And that, of course, is then filtered and dried and shipped to the smelter.

Would the flotation system be used in conjunction with the cyanide system, or is it used separately?

Yes and no. The flotation system can be used separately or in conjunction. At the Cord Mill it was used in conjunction. There, the flotation concentrates, instead of being shipped, actually had their own cyanidation process whereby the cyanide solutions dissolve the gold and silver in the flotation concentrates and eventually went through a bag zinc precipitation system and then to smelting on the site.

So that was still fairly new technology, even in the 1930s when you were at Cord Mill then, the flotation?

Oh, yes.

Only ten, fifteen years.

It hadn't been around very long after all, but it was a very common method. It was used almost everywhere. Well, just like so many new systems coming in, why, in the 1930s they thought the flotation was the answer to all our problems. Of course, it wasn't. But anyway, flotation was used very extensively in the early 1930s.

OK. And you said it wasn't the answer to all the problems. Were there certain situations where it just didn't work?

Well . . . or may not float as well as the people thought it should. That was one of the problems.

What about amalgamation? Give me a definition of that.

Amalgamation is an extremely old system whereby the gold pulp or slurry is put in contact with mercury in one way or another, and the gold and silver—free gold and silver that is—adheres to the mercury and forms what we call an amalgam. And that amalgam is collected, either by gravity or on silver plates, and then it is put through a distillation process where the mercury is driven off leaving the sponge of gold and silver behind.

I see. OK. And was that used in conjunction with the cyanide process or not?

It could be used, yes. If you had free gold, it would be very logical and almost imperative that you used amalgamation to retrieve the free gold, because cyanidation does not work very well . . . does not work at all on coarse gold, because it's too slow a process.

I see. Was the amalgamation a part of the Cord Mill or was it not?

I believe amalgamation was used somewhere in the Cord Mill but not extensively.

More was sent to the flotation system?

That's right. It might have been used as an amalgamation trap somewhere. But I know very little about amalgamation being used at the Cord Mill.

OK. What about gravity concentration? Give me a definition of that.

Well, gravity concentration was used more when the desired mineral is concentrated, because it is heavier than the gangue mineral and, therefore, by panning or shaking tables or sluice boxes or something like that, why, the heavy minerals are retrieved.

So that's the idea behind panning for gold?

That's exactly the principle. Panning is a principle that's used in the concentration processes.

You also mentioned a piece of equipment at the Cord Mill, the rake bowl classifier. Could you tell me something about that? Was that an ordinary piece of equipment or was that unusual?

Well, it's the combination, you might say, of two different ideas. A rake classifier is whereby the coarse material, because it sinks to the bottom more readily, is gradually raked out of the bottom or the lower part of the classifier and goes back to the mill for regrinding. Well, combine that with a larger bowl, such as eight, ten, twelve feet in diameter at the lower end of this rake classifier whereby you have a lighter situation with your pulp. And the heavier, coarser material sinks to the bottom. And

then, eventually, the rakes pick that up and take it back to the mill.

A bowl classifier is something like a thickener, you might say, whereby there are rakes at the bottom that move very slowly, and as the heavy particles sink to the bottom, these rakes pull them into a central spot where a pump pumps the slurry to some other part of the mill. A bowl classifier is something like that.

It's a process for separating the two different sizes of material.

That's exactly what it adds up to. The principle is to remove the coarser particles that may require finer grinding and get them back to the grinding mill.

Since it was at the very end of the last tape, I'd like you to talk about . . . you were at the Cord Mill for about three or four months. Did you spend any time in Silver Peak, the town?

I went through Silver Peak on occasion, but to my knowledge I never actually stopped in Silver Peak except, at one time, I stopped at the outskirts of Silver Peak to visit an uncle (my only uncle by the way) who was living there and working at a nearby mine. And, to my knowledge, this is the last time I saw the man.

You told us a little bit about Uncle Johnny, and he was known as "Moonshine Johnny," and your visit with him, but could you describe where he lived?

To the best I recall, it was a small cabin on the outskirts. [laughter] I don't know, maybe a ten-by-sixteen cabin or something like that at the most. And he seemed to be very happy there.

Was it a wood cabin?

Oh, yes. It's not a tent house. It was actually a wood-frame cabin.

Was it something he rented, or did he own it?

Oh, I have no idea. He undoubtedly rented. There was no reason for him to own a cabin.

OK. Because you called him a ten-day miner. He moved around?

That's correct. He moved around quite a bit. I will admit that this time in his life, why, he probably settled down a little bit, and he probably worked at that mine longer than he usually worked at mines.

Yes, but it still would have been unusual for him to have owned this.

No reason whatsoever for him to own property.

OK. He died in that area. Do you know if he's buried there in Silver Peak?

To the best of my knowledge, he must be buried in Goldfield, because he died at the hospital in Goldfield. See, Silver Peak would be in Esmeralda County, and, therefore, he went to the county hospital. As I understand, he went to a county hospital in Goldfield and died there.

Working at the Cord Mill seems to have left an impression on you. Can you tell me what it was about that experience in your career that was important to you?

[laughter] As best I recall, one thing that struck me is the first time I had experience with a large piece of equipment that was too large to be easily handled on the roads for transportation, being cut in half and then welded back together again as one piece.

That was the rake bowl classifier. It came from the Weepah Mill. I don't know how long Weepah Mill was operating. The discovery of Weepah was made in 1927, and when it was shut down, I don't know.

You had heard of this before, of cutting equipment in two in order to move it. Is that correct? Or had you not even heard of it before?

I don't think I even heard of it before. Since then I've run into all kinds of things . . . large pieces of equipment being cut and rewelded together, but this was a new idea to me.

OK. How large is this piece of equipment? If you had to describe it, is it as big as your house, or is it as big as this room?

Oh, no, it's about twenty to twenty-six feet long and as wide as about twelve feet.

And so, when they cut it in half, was it the length that they had to cut in order to move it?

It was rather long. Yes, they cut it in half crosswise. In other words, they cut the length in half.

And then moved it on two trucks?

Yes, apparently that's what they did. The fact is that it was a rather new idea to many people there. They thought it was a novel situation.

OK. What else impressed you?

Well, of course, I was particularly impressed by S. Power Warren's idea of transferring sands from one tank to another and thereby increasing the possibility of good gold recovery. It was absolutely an innovation. I don't know of it being done

before or after that. I was impressed by Mr. Warren's knowledge of the metallurgical industry. That's it, I guess.

Did you get to know him pretty well while you were there?

Oh, just fairly well, and following that experience I met him at a few meetings years later. Another thing I appreciated about the Cord Mill is their system of pumps. All the pumps were in the same place; it was very easy to get at them and very well designed, planned.

And he, S. Power Warren, was the one who designed it. Is that correct?

Yes, definitely. He was the one who designed it. He came up with the idea. Where he got it, I don't know.

I don't think there was anything else. [laughter] Maybe, one thing that bothered me is that the time I was there I never did get up to the mine. [laughter] The Mary Mine.

Which was fairly close, right? It was right nearby.

Yes, it was only a few miles away, you know, but I never had an occasion to get there.

You would have liked to have seen it inside, would you?

Oh, yes. I would have liked to have seen something about what they were doing there. And the other thing that impressed me in that area is that, below the Cord Mill is an old volcano crater which shows up in all pictures that you have of that particular area. And my partner and I climbed around there quite a bit. It was interesting to us to imagine just how the lava flowed out. And you could see, looking at the remains there, just what happened. One side of this crater

gave way, and the lava flowed out over the flats.

Yes, you'll be interested [in this]. When I was there, one of the people at the Mineral Ridge Resources told me that volcano still shows up as hot on the map from satellite mapping.

Oh, yes, it would.

Yes, it's fairly new in terms of earth age.

Oh, yes. Yes, it is. That's right. It's relatively young.

It would have been really interesting.

Yes, you go out there; it looks like it might have happened a couple of weeks ago or something. [laughter] And it would show up in photographs very readily, because here you have a bland desert area, just absolutely flat, and right in the middle of it is this volcano.

Yes, because this volcano is not part of the mountain range. It's separate.

Oh, absolutely not. No mountains near it at all.

Let's talk about where you went from Silver Peak, especially some of your experiences in Nevada. You had a pretty long career in Nevada mining.

Well, first from Silver Peak I went to Northern California on a little gold project that we tried there for a few months. And from there (I guess, it was about 1939 or 1940) I got a job with the department of education in Carson City teaching prospecting classes under what they called their vocational education department. And I taught these classes for a few years, and they were stopped very suddenly by World War

II. I remember so distinctly having taken some members of the class out to look at some mining properties and prospects on that December 7, 1941. And when we came back, the first person I dropped off, why, his wife came out and said, "The Japs have just . . . bombed Pearl Harbor." [pause]

That was an emotional thing for you.

Yes.

Tell me why that was such an emotional thing.

Well, at the time I didn't think of it as being so emotional, but when I think back about it, why, it . . . it definitely was an emotional experience to many people.

Yes. How did it affect you?

At that time, I . . . well, it was a terrific shock, of course, and you're wondering what's going to happen next. And then the . . . the extreme caution of not having your lights exposed at night and covering up all your windows with craft paper so that the light could not shine out. And I remember so distinctly covering the windows in the building that I was using to teach the prospecting classes in Fallon at that time. And then, of course, right after that, why, they needed mining engineers and geologists very badly to appraise mining claims—to determine what damage was being done to the claim holders. And that's when I was, more or less, "recruited" you might say, or ordered [laughter] to stand in line with them.

Were you in the military, or you were just . . . ?

Oh, no. This was strictly civilian.

A civilian government job?

Yes. Yes. It was under the war department.

OK. And when you say, "what the damage was" . . . tell me a little bit more about the job.

Well, the damage would be that for the prospectors, because we were talking about the claims on bombing and gunnery ranges. The prospector could not go onto his claim to do any work. Therefore, there was some damages due to him.

So the government was essentially taking that land back?

Absolutely, taking it back temporarily at least. So, many places where people thought they had some potential, they could not go in to determine that potential.

OK. And what was your job specifically? What did you do?

Well, we would go onto these mining properties and list the improvements that had been made and, as best we could, evaluate what the mineral potential was for that property and write brief reports on this. And that in turn was taken to the real estate people in the same group, and they would negotiate with the owner as to what damages were due.

So your assessment was, at least, part of the decision on what was due to the miners?

That's correct, yes.

So you went from teaching prospecting to working for the war department. What happened then? How long did that go on? Because the mines and the mills were being shut down. Mines all over Nevada.

Yes. L208 stopped all gold mining.

What's L208? Was it legislation?

L208 was their governmental It was not actually legislation. I don't know whether legislation, or it might have been a presidential order. I don't know what. But anyway, [it was through L208] whereby most gold mines were shut down, because the labor and the materials were needed elsewhere.

OK. So that came along about the time that you were appraising this land or before it?

I don't know. In that general time period.

So when you finished with that, working for the war department, what did you do next?

Well, I worked in a small mercury mine in northern California for a few months. About that time, my brother, who was living in Southern California, lost his wife, and I decided to go to the Los Angeles area to be with him for a while. And, of all things, I worked in the shipyards for a while. [laughter]

What did you do there?

Oh, it had something to do with the determination of how much in the way of munitions could be stored in certain compartments and was it logical. And then I finally realized that I best get back to Nevada. And I was able to get a job with the U.S. Bureau of Mines drilling iron deposits and one fluor spar deposit in Nevada. And after working for the U.S. Bureau for a few years, why, I had the yen again to go out on my own to try to see what I could do, and I worked . . . I prospected, you might say, and worked in tungsten. Actually, we found

a little tungsten ore, and we milled at Bishop, California. And following that, why, the Nevada Bureau of Mines was interested in someone that had a little writing experience to work with them. And my writing experience, of course, had come from my work with the U.S. Bureau of Mines where I wrote three different publications on my work with them. That was on iron ore as well as fluorspar.

Then, when I was with the Nevada Bureau of Mines, I first studied the mining districts of Nye County and wrote a bulletin on that. And following that, why, the Nevada Bureau of Mines and the U.S. Geological Survey started a cooperative agreement to study the iron deposits in Nevada. And, of course, I'd already had some experience with iron ore deposits, so I fit into that pretty well. The goal was to find out more about the potential of iron ore in Nevada and, therefore, help companies that might be interested in mining iron ore in Nevada. At that particular time, Nevada iron ore was particularly desirable for the open-hearth, iron-ore smelting system being used in the Midwest. It was, therefore, very logical that this project go forward. We first studied the ore deposits out of Lovelock, which were very important, and at that time ore was being shipped to the Midwest for the smelters.

For what purpose? Why was there such a demand for iron ore at that point?

That particular iron ore we had in Nevada was a high grade magnetite ore that was over 60 percent . . . or right around 60 percent iron—was heavy and, therefore, in the open-hearth system, it would sink readily in the melt and help oxidize impurities.

Say a little bit more about that. It helped oxidize impurities?

In the iron ore. The open hearth system is principally to make the blast furnace process into a pure iron.

OK. And Nevada had high quality iron ore, [which] was very desirable.

Yes, helped that a great deal. Oddly enough, that system is not being used nowadays.

Really. What happened to it? Do you know?

Well, now they use an oxygen-lance system. They put the oxygen into this melt with oxygen lances instead of using the ore. It's an entirely different process now.

So Nevada's iron ore is not in demand like it was when you were working on it.

No, not for that purpose. [laughter] At the time this work was going on out of Lovelock and some mining was done in iron ore, the iron ore, besides being shipped to the Midwest, was also being used as ballast in ships. And it was also being used as a uranium shield. And I forget now just exactly how that was used, but the concrete made out of high grade iron ore makes an extremely good radioactive shield.

I see. So the beginning of nuclear energy created a demand for the iron ore, too.

That's correct. That's all I can recall about that particular part.

The cooperative effort between the Nevada Bureau of Mines and the U.S. Geological Survey was started in Lovelock, and we made an extensive geologic survey of that area and then went elsewhere in the state, and several small deposits that we worked on were continually worked for a long time after that for iron ore.

OK. And did you go beyond Lovelock? You went around all of Nevada?

Oh, yes, we went into northern Nevada and an iron deposit near a Jungo, Nevada.

Where is that located? I'm not familiar with that.

It's on the Western Pacific Railroad, north of the Black Rock Desert. And there were a couple of other places in the state—one out of Wabusca that was also being worked and the one right near Gabbs, Nevada. That's a rather small deposit but a very interesting one.

Interesting for what reason?

[laughter] Well, it was interesting to me, because there's this one particular mineral referred to as "mountain leather," which is a by-product . . . is an outcome of the metamorphism of a ferro-magnesium mineral. And this mountain leather looks just exactly like a chunk of leather. And that's the only place that I ever found the specimen myself. It occurs in many places, I presume, but I found it there, and I thought that made it very interesting to me.

That is interesting—rocks that look like leather.

Yes, actually, a rock finally ends up being something that's just like a piece of leather.

Feels like leather?

Feels like leather. [laughter]

That is amazing. So you were all over northern Nevada then with this iron ore project.

Yes, yes. I got around northern Nevada quite a bit on that project.

And published three documents from that?

Yes, I think, there are three different parts under one name. The first one was called, *Ore Deposits of Buena Vista Valley*, and the others are *Ore Deposits of Nevada*, parts one or parts something or other.

What happened after the Nevada Bureau of Mines job? Where did you go from there?

[laughter] Oh, because of my experience with iron ore in Nevada, I got acquainted with the Ford Motor Company people that came out here looking at these deposits. And this man said that in a few months they might have an opportunity . . . might have an opening for a mining engineer geologist in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, which is the Lake Superior country. And lo and behold, that developed, and I told him I was interested because I went into mining because I wanted to see various, far parts of the world, and I hadn't gone much farther than Nevada so far. [laughter] Well, I got to California with the war department. I got into New Mexico, too.

Then, in January of 1955, why, the family and I moved to Iron Mountain, Michigan.

And how long were you there?

Almost fifteen years.

And what was your job there?

To look after Ford Motor Company's mineral lands in the Upper Peninsula. And old Henry Ford wanted to be self-sufficient in everything, including iron ore, and he also wanted to be self-sufficient in the hardwood that was being used in the station-wagon bodies at that particular time.

Therefore, he bought up a lot of lands in the Upper Peninsula for the hardwood as well as for the iron ore potential there. And they actually mined iron ore there. My first job when I got to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan was to shut down and dismantle what was left of one of the iron-ore mines there, because it was no longer profitable. And then I explored for iron ore for them in the Upper Peninsula. And one thing lead to another, and I started looking for other things on their lands, too, but, although I found some good leads, why, the company was not particularly interested in prospecting. Almost the exact words that they told me. So, eventually, they decided to move my office to Dearborn, Michigan, and having had six months experience in Dearborn previously, why, I decided that that was not for me, and they gave me the opportunity for early retirement, which I took immediately.

What didn't you like about Dearborn?

Too many people, and I don't necessarily like the way large corporations work.

I see. What about them? Can you say? If you had to name one thing, what [would it be]?

Well, the one thing that I noticed—there's too much of a competitive attitude among the employees instead of a cooperative attitude to get the job done. And that, I could not stand.

Had you run into that in Nevada in your mining experience, or was Ford Motor Company the first time you saw that?

No, that was the first time I saw it. And although you will find that, maybe, in many companies, no matter where you are, why, in my mining experience I had not run into that. There was more of a cooperation to get the job done.

So men in management, workers and management, everybody was working together in Nevada from . . .

Well, it appeared that way to me. Yes, we were all working pretty much in conjunction with each other. From there I worked with the Hanna Mining Company for about three years . . . No, I'm sorry, for about six or seven years. And three years of that were largely in southern Arizona, and three years were in the state of Maine, where we were trying to find nickel copper reserves on a deposit that had been known for over a hundred years there.

Tell me what brought you back to Nevada finally.

Well, finally, Hanna Mining Company didn't need my services and gave me the opportunity for an early retirement, which I took then. And I had a friend in New Mexico who was a land surveyor, and being as how I had spent much of my career in land surveying, why, I worked with him for a while. But at the same time I was doing some work for the Arizona Department of Mineral Resources. I soon found that I couldn't be doing both. So when I finished the job with the Arizona Department of Mineral Resources, I decided I'd look into Nevada. I made one trip out here, and I found that I had not lost all my ties to Nevada by any means, and I came back to Nevada.

I want to go back just a little bit. You touched briefly on when you were teaching prospecting. Tell me a little bit about those classes and how that was set up.

Well, the classes were set up for three or four weeks at a time. And when they were set up for three weeks, I would just teach mineralogy, more or less, and a little bit of geology and the study of rocks with the students. That's all it amounted to. But if it

was set up for four weeks, well, then I also taught them the rudiments of fire assaying. And that was very interesting to me, because that was something I had done in the past; I had done quite a bit of fire assaying.

Describe that process.

Oh, fire assaying? It's where you take a known quantity of ground pulp and mix it with certain fluxes and smelt it in a crucible in a small furnace. And in this flux or mixture you have also put a lot of litharge, where you ended up with about a twenty-gram button of lead, and that lead would contain your gold and silver values. And that is put back in the furnace in what we call a cupel that absorbs the lead but leaves the gold and silver bead behind. Then you weigh the bead, which is both gold and silver, and dissolve the silver out of it with nitric acid leaving gold which you weigh to determine the gold content. And being as how you started with a known quantity, by certain formulae, it's a very simple matter to determine how much gold you have per ton in that ore.

OK. That's a process that's been around for . . .

[laughter] It's been around for . . . maybe not to Agricola, but it's been around for a long, long, time.

Centuries, is that correct?

Yes, I'm sure. yes.

And it sounds like you took the students out into Nevada.

Yes. I liked the field trips very much, because there I could go right on the ground and look at somebody's prospect and

explain things more easily than I could in the class. The students liked it, too.

They could really see what you were talking about with the different rock formations being together and so on.

Yes, yes. In the classroom I would have all kinds of mineral specimens to show them and rock specimens, but it was a lot easier . . . I found that the students who were all adult persons in various vocations in life—carpenters and whatever—were very much interested in this, but I could teach them more out in the field than I could in the classroom.

Were these evening classes? You said they're adult . . .

Yes, they were all evening classes.

About how many students would you have in each class?

Oh, you'd have maybe a dozen, and sometimes you'd go . . . maybe forty or fifty students, you know. I taught these classes here at the university, too, for adults. And there, why, we had quite a few students, actually.

OK. But these were all people who were going to do mining as an avocation rather than a job?

As an avocation, strictly an avocation. It was not meant to train miners or not to train people that would have to understand a lot. And if they were professional people in the mining industry, this was not for them at all.

Because it was very basic, just so somebody could get started.

Extremely basic, yes. It was to get people interested in prospecting. And the idea is

that, after all, if people get interested in prospecting and find something, it means a great deal to the economy of the U.S. as well as the state.

Because if they prospect and they happen on something that really has some value, then they would be able to establish a mine, sell it Is that the process?

Oh, yes. And then the taxes would develop out of that to help both the U.S. government as well as the state, wherever they are, and the counties, of course.

So it was training more people to be involved in the business of mining but in their spare time.

Yes. Strictly an avocation.

OK. Since you came back to Nevada from all over the United States—Michigan, New Mexico, and so on—have you worked for a company, or have you been doing your own projects?

Oh, no. It's exclusively consulting work whereby I'd work on, maybe, evaluating prospects or getting some ideas, or it might be land-records work, something like that. Just whatever's necessary.

Do you do any work with the university still or have you since you came back?

No. I have done no work here, no teaching at the university.

But you're very active in a couple of associations. Is that correct?

Oh, yes. I'm active in my professional organization, which is the Society of Mining,

Metallurgical, and Exploration Engineers, and part of the American Institute of Mining, Petroleum Engineers. [laughter]

They've changed the name right. [laughter]

Yes, they have.

And is there a local chapter to that?

Yes, there is a local section here, of which I was secretary for a long time. Now they sort of call me secretary emeritus, and I help do quite a bit of work with that organization all the time. And one of the outcomes of that group is to put out a historic mining calendar every year, which is a fundraiser for scholastic contributions that we make. And that takes a lot of my time.

Just putting together the calendar, finding the photographs, identifying, and so on.

Yes, yes. You're almost to the bottom of our photographs, too. We've got to find a new source.

I think we've covered everything that I need for the Silver Peak history. I really appreciate your contribution to this.

I'm sure happy to help. I wish I knew more about some of the things that you'd like to know, but I just don't.

Well, the parts that you do know have been very valuable, and I appreciate it. Thank you.

Glad to help.

ELMER T. “HEFTY” SANDERSON

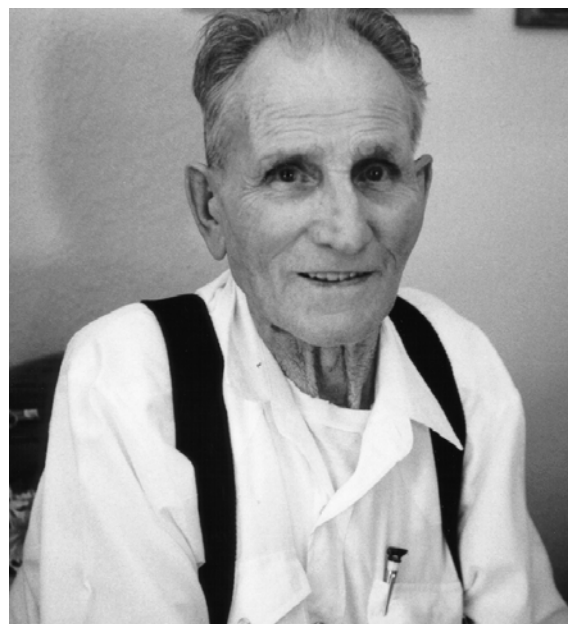
A *VARIETY OF BUSINESSES are needed in any small mining town to support the main industry and its workers. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Hefty Sanderson was a central figure in Silver Peak as operator of The Black Mammoth—a bar, restaurant, gas station, and motel. Hefty was well-known in the area and later became sheriff of Mineral County. He died just a few months after this oral history interview, on December 30, 1996, at the age of eighty.*



ELMER T. “HEFTY” SANDERSON: I was born in Weston County, Wyoming, in 1916. It’s up next to the South Dakota line at New Castle.

VICTORIA FORD: *So you grew up in Wyoming?*

Yes, I did. Dad had a farm and some stock, but things were kind of tough down there then, so I left there and went up to Butte, Montana, around Ennis and Norris, and went to work in the mines there. I was probably around seventeen, eighteen.



Did you finish high school before you left home?

Oh, yes. Then I worked at this little gold property in Norris, Montana. That’s just a little ways out of Butte. And the name of the mine was Grubstake.

Was this during the Depression then? Had the stock market already gone down?

Yes.

So mining was one of the important jobs then?

About the only one, really. I worked in Montana for a couple of years, and then I wanted to quit and come to Hawthorne. They didn't want me to quit, and so the boss told me that if I quit, he'd see that I got into the service. I had tried to join the service, but I'd had both of my ankles broken, and they weren't in real good shape, and I was hard of hearing. So I said, "Well, shoot your best lick, because I don't give a damn what you do." So I quit and came to Hawthorne, and there was a lot of work here then.

Tell me how you broke both ankles.

Well, one of them, a horse fell on me, and the other one, I caught it in a flywheel on a Superior gas engine and pulled it down in between the wheel and the frame.

Was that while you were mining?

No, that was before that. We never had much money, and I was living at home at the time, so my mother set the bones. And she did a good job.

You didn't have any trouble walking after that?

No, but they did draft me, and I did go to the service. But they only kept me a short while, and then they discharged me.

Because of your ankles again?

And my hearing.

So you came to Hawthorne from Montana. What did you do here?

Well, I first started working for one of the contractors [in Hawthorne] in the first part of 1948. And after I worked with them for a while, why, I bought a dump truck, and I hired it out to the company. They were building all of those ammunition bunkers and roads.

I went to Silver Peak first, but I just stayed there a short time that time before I came to Hawthorne.

So from Montana you went to Silver Peak. Was the Mary Mine going then?

Oh, yes. That's where I met . . . we used to call him Red Swanson, and he was the shift boss at the Mary. I went up there and hired out.

That's Merle Swanson, and you called him Red? He was your shift boss?

Yes.

What was he like to work for?

Oh, great. Yes, he was fine.

I wonder if you're in one of those pictures. There's a picture of him and his crew that I should have brought with me for you to look at. I bet you're in that picture somewhere.

Probably was. If I was, I'd be standing in back, because I was so tall.

So you worked for Merle for a year or so. What did you do when you were working with Merle?

I was a miner, and I drilled and blasted and timbered. I was working with a guy that was there when I arrived, and I don't know

how he latched on to this name, but they called him Post Hole Bill.

Post Hole Bill. He was your partner underground?

Yes.

Did you already have your nickname [Hefty]?

Oh, yes. You'd never know it now, but I weighed 230 pounds and was 6'4½", so I didn't take any guff off of anybody. I just held up for myself.

From Silver Peak you came to Hawthorne, and then you went back again later?

Well, I went back when I bought that property off of [Jimmy] Gavin. He had married Marie a few years before that. I knew Jimmy for years before he got sick, and then he just didn't feel like he could operate anymore over there. He had what they called the Shifting Sands Bar, and so I bought that off of him and Marie. Before I went back over there, I got married to a lady that had five kids. She went over there with me, and we took all of the kids. I had a home here in Hawthorne, and so I sold it and used the money to establish a business in Silver Peak.

Was that just a bar in Silver Peak or was that also a restaurant?

Well, it was kind of a snack deal—not a full-fledged restaurant. But I bought the property next door, which was the old Black Mammoth bar, and it was a good-sized building. I did a lot of work on it first and then opened it up with a restaurant and a bar. My wife and I operated that.

Then I bought some modular units new in Tonopah and moved them out there, and that gave us six units for a motel. Then

Harvey Humphrey had the gas station, so we bought that off of him. That left us with a bar and a cafe and a motel and a gas station, so we had just about everything in Silver Peak.

Was there a grocery store at that time?

Just kind of a quick stop. That's about it.

Was this in the 1950s, or was this later than that when you went back?

I think we went over there in 1958.

So you would have been there before Foote Mineral came in, is that right?

It was there when I was there.

OK. So there were some people in town working at Foote Mineral. Was there much mining going on then?

Quite a bit. There were several little properties that they were working on around there, and they were working on the Mary, and Foote Mineral was in there on the lake. It was a pretty thriving community.

So right into the 1960s things were busy around there?

Yes, they were.

You had a good business going then? And the community could support it?

Sure did. Yes. I bought some steers at the sale in Fallon and took them to Silver Peak and grained them—gave them the oats and corn and all the hay and stuff that they wanted. And I got them in really good shape. Then I took them back to Fallon and had them butchered one at a time, and I put on a free barbecue for everybody in the country. We had hundreds of people coming

out there for a barbecue. That came easy for me: I'd done a lot of cooking anyway.

When did you learn about cooking?

When I was in the army, they sent me to cook and baker school for a couple of months, I guess, before I got out of the army.

Did you do most of the cooking then for the business?

No, we hired cooks.

You mostly ran the business end of it? Buying the supplies and making sure everything was operating?

Yes, that's about it.

Were the kids old enough to help, the stepkids?

Not really.

Did they go to school there in Silver Peak?

Yes, they did. Alberta Merritt was their teacher.

How long did you have those businesses?

About fifteen years, and then my wife decided she didn't need me anymore, so she took up with a truckdriver and spent my money on him. Then I had to leave Silver Peak.

Did you have to give up your businesses when all that happened?

She got them when we got divorced. Well, I didn't contest anything—I just gave her what she wanted. And it was kind of a sad deal, because I . . . I really liked her. And, well, she hurt me pretty bad when she took off. I wouldn't care if she had left for

somebody that was worthy, but he was a truckdriver, and he didn't have anything—about as worthless as he could get. I thought about shooting him. Then I thought, "Well, if she didn't like it, I'd probably have to shoot her, too." [ironic laughter] I decided that wouldn't be the logical thing for me to do, because I'd wind up in jail. So I just left and gave her everything.

It's ironic to hear you say that you were thinking about shooting him, because after that you came to Hawthorne and became the sheriff, right?

Yes.

You might not have been able to do that if you had shot that fellow?

No, probably not. But it used to kind of gripe me to go into the bar and the cafe that I made, spent my money for, and have him sitting in my office counting my money. It was about all that I could take. I carried a gun in my pocket for a week thinking about it, and then I finally just gave it up. It would have been a poor thing to do.

That was a big part of your life, that fifteen years in Silver Peak building those businesses.

Oh, man. Yes. And I enjoyed all of her kids. They were all good kids. The littlest one was two years old when I got him, so he thought I was his daddy. I have no squawk on them, and I have no squawk on her, really. If she didn't want me, I couldn't blame her for that.

So you helped raise the youngest one until he was a teenager?

Yes, I did.

Do the kids stay in touch with you?

Yes. I hear from all of them from time to time.

That wasn't a very happy ending at Silver Peak for you.

No, but I still like Silver Peak. It was off to itself. I actually made the town, and I just kind of hated to give it up. It was a great little camp, although it went up and down. People'd come and go, and mines would open up and close up. But all in all, it was just a good camp. I worked down at mining camps quite a little, and I just liked Silver Peak for what it was—lots of nice people there.

After you left Silver Peak, you came here to Hawthorne and became sheriff. Did you get into law enforcement right away?

No, it was a while. I bought some trucks and worked them out on the base and worked around at different things. I bought houses and sold houses and moved houses. And then, eventually, I got talked into running for sheriff, and I had no trouble at all getting elected for Mineral County. I had enjoyed my time while I was in Silver Peak, but I had to do something to get my mind off of Silver Peak and off what took place over there.

You must have been in Silver Peak when Harvey Humphrey was there and who else?

Yes. Jimmy and Marie [Gavin] and Harvey Humphrey. There was a number of people I can't think of.

Jimmy worked in the mines. He was the half brother of Bob Smith, and Bob worked there in the mines. [This was not the same Smith family that ran the store.] Jimmy ran that Shifting Sands Bar, but it was just a little one-room affair. Marie drank quite a bit. She always carried a glass of wine

around with her, and she said, "You know, I'm getting sick and tired of these people calling me a wino. That's not true. I'll drink anything." [laughter] Marie came from Hawthorne, and I knew her when she was here in Hawthorne before she married Jimmy.

Did you ever have any trouble with miner's consumption from having been in the mines? Any trouble with your lungs?

No, because I was one of the young fellows that wouldn't drill dry. They could hook water up to those machines, and you could drill without causing a lot of dust. I actually quit several times when they'd bring me a dry machine. The men would come out of there at night, and they'd have so much dust in their nose and around their mouth where they were breathing that old rock dust. It was heavy: you couldn't spit it up. So when they wanted me to drill dry, why, I would just quit and go somewhere else to work, because a good miner could go to work anywhere.

We really weren't overpaid. It was a job—that's about it. But it was a way to make a living.

Especially during Depression years when you started. And then the mining kind of slowed during World War II?

Yes. It never did completely quit, but it did slack off.

So even though the government closed down some of the mines, there were still people out doing some work on their own, is that true?

Yes, a lot of leasers.

When you were at Silver Peak, were there any big controversies in the town, any big issues?

I don't know whether you've run onto him or not, but we had one guy there that was an agitator, Ken Pullman. He liked to stir the community, and every time there was [an] election he ran for something. He never did get elected. [laughter] Oh, he'd tell the people all about somebody else's business—what they should have done, and what they didn't do, and what he would do if he had the opportunity. [laughter]

Did you run for any offices when you were in Silver Peak?

The only thing was that Governor Grant Sawyer appointed me as county commissioner to fill the vacancy that was created by a death, and I accepted it, so I was [Esmeralda] county commissioner in Silver Peak for a couple years. I did file again, but I got beat because When the county clerk retired, the county commissioners paid her for twenty or twenty-five years, 10 percent of the wages that she'd made, and I didn't think that was right. And [they paid her] for sick leave she hadn't taken—that's another thing that they get paid for. It seemed kind of ridiculous to me, and I voted against paying her all of that back time for sick leave. So all of the county employees got out on the bandstand and campaigned bitterly against me, because they didn't want to end up in the same shape. They didn't like to get knocked out of the grandstand there and not be able to collect sick leave for twenty-five or thirty years. But it was hard for me to believe that they didn't get sick in twenty-five or thirty years and use part of it. So I was strictly again[st] it. It had cost the county lots of money, and this Ken Pullman, he was one of the ones that got out and waved the banner against me for getting that changed. I was definitely responsible for getting it changed. Well, there were three commissioners, so all I had to do was just get one other one [to vote with me], but I got everybody.

Also, I didn't do a lot of campaigning: I wasn't that crazy about that job anyway.

When you were running the restaurant and the bar, was the town's water system adequate for your business or did you have to haul water there?

No, we did all right. The county furnished water.

What about transportation? Were the roads paved into Silver Peak when you were operating your business, or was it still gravel?

No, it was paved. Lindsay and Gordon Smith used to be in Gabbs, and when they were in Silver Peak they carried quite a bit of weight. They got that road paved into Silver Peak. (They finally wound up buying the El Cap in Hawthorne years later.)

Was it unusual for someone like yourself, who had been in mining, to go into business? You mentioned that you did that and Jimmy Gavin did that.

I don't know whether it was unusual or not, or whether it's something that just happened, but it turned out good for both of us.

Yes. Were you and Jimmy friends?

Oh, yes, for years.

What did you do for good times? You mentioned one thing—when you threw that big barbecue for everybody.

Yes, I did that two or three times and got lots of people If you want to get a lot of customers, cook them up a nice, big meal and give it to them. Then you'd have no trouble getting customers. I enjoyed it. I

liked to do it, because I had lots of friends, and I liked to take care of them.

Did you have time off to go out with your friends and do anything?

I mostly worked, and I enjoyed it.

Did you see many people who ended up with trouble with alcohol when you were there?

I suppose there were some, but I can't remember that there were a lot of them.

How did you handle that in the bar if somebody got out of hand? Were you in charge of handling that?

Yes. Well, if they got too bad, we ask them if they'd just please leave. And if they said they wouldn't go and gave me any trouble, why, I'd just throw them out.

And you were big enough to do that. You probably didn't get too much argument, did you?

Not too much, but some.

When Foote Mineral came in to Silver Peak in the 1960s, did you see any sign of people starting to take drugs instead of just alcohol?

Not really. I suppose there was some, but I can't think of anybody that really got onto it and stayed there.

Are there any funny stories that you have about that area that you like to tell? I suspect some of you guys were a lot of fun to be around, like when they moved that school building into town. And Ruby tells a story, too, about going up to the Nivloc and building a dam so they could have a park.

I got in on that. I just donated a hundred dollars for them to use to put the dam in. A lot of people did. A lot of people used to go up there and stay overnight, and then they stocked it with fish and just made a nice recreation place.

Did you get much chance to go up there? Did you ever go stay overnight?

No. I was busy.

So it seems like one of the important things about Silver Peak was that there were some really good people there.

Yes, there sure was. Most generally, those people who have to work hard for a living are understanding and accommodating, and everybody was great.

You said that Silver Peak always had its ups and downs. Did you see that while you were there with your business?

No, not really, because mining was really pretty constant then. There'd be a mine start and then work for a while, and then it'd close down. And then another one would start, and then another one would close down . . . another one would start. So that was what I was talking about on the ups and downs.

So there were ups and downs, but there was never a time while you were there when everything was closed down. There was always something going on?

It was absolutely great. I used to borrow \$25,000 a week for the guys who'd come into my place and cash their paychecks rather than have to take it to Tonopah or someplace. And then that's where they'd spend the money. I thought that was pretty good—that I was able to borrow \$25,000 a week. I still get a thing from that bank over

there encouraging me to come borrow if I need a loan or if I need anything that the bank could provide. They'd like to get me back in there. I can see why, too. Twenty-five thousand a week—that was a pretty good little hunk.

Your business was really good so you could borrow it, but it also gives a sense of what kind of payroll was going through the town.

Yes. Yes, it was great. And I did a lot of work on that Black Mammoth bar and cafe. I completely remodeled it inside and out, and it just made a good spot for everybody to come to.

Did you do most of the work yourself?

Part of it, but part of it I hired done. I had a guy come out of Fallon to put that brick on the outside. And then I hired some help to sheetrock it on the inside. A lot of work I did: a lot of work I hired.

Where did you live in Silver Peak? Did you have a house there with your wife and the kids that was separate from the business?

Oh, yes. I came to Hawthorne and bought a big, three-bedroom trailer unit, and then I moved it out there, so that gave us a place to live. I put it up alongside of the bar, where I could just go from one to the other.

Were there things for kids to do around there? Were they pretty happy in Silver Peak?

Oh, yes. They loved it. They could swim, and they could play basketball and play football. Yes, the kids did fine.

And then after your divorce, when you left and came to Hawthorne, did you ever go back there to live again?

No. I think I was in Silver Peak with that business while I was married for seventeen years. It was a nice time in my life, and I enjoyed it very much.

DENNIS GADDY SR.

SILVER PEAK survived the 1960s, in part due to Foote Mineral Company [now Cyprus Foote Mineral]. Its extraction of lithium from the underground water of the Clayton Playa offered steady employment and modified the boom-and-bust cycle of Silver Peak's gold mines. Production Superintendent Dennis Gaddy Sr. was a good example of a steady employee who also contributed volunteer services to the community. He has lived in Silver Peak for twenty-five years, raised his children there, and served as both volunteer fireman and deputy sheriff.



VICTORIA FORD: Today is September 24, 1996, and I am with Dennis Gaddy Sr. in his office at Cyprus Foote Mineral in Silver Peak, Nevada. Dennis, let's start with some information about you. Tell me what year you were born and where.

DENNIS GADDY SR.: I was born in 1949 in San Bernardino, California.

OK, and can you tell me a little bit about how you arrived in Nevada?



In 1971 I had the opportunity to take a job here with (at that time) Foote Mineral Company, and I moved out from southern California.

And did you get your training in mining in California?

No. I had some college down there. I finished after I started working here.

I see. Your degree is what?

Chemical engineering . . . it's general chemical engineering. Actually, this process [at Cyprus Foote Mineral] is more a chemical plant than mining.

So I need to change my terminology. And the first time you came to Nevada was to come here?

No, actually, the year before that my wife's parents were operating a small tungsten mine in Railroad Valley, and we visited out there a couple of times.

What I'd like to do is talk a little bit about your impressions of Silver Peak when you first arrived in 1971. Can you tell me a little bit about the town? What was here?

There were probably about a hundred people. Most of the buildings were old, with [the] exception of the company trailer park. My wife and I both came from small towns in southern California, so we liked it immediately. I had worked for about a year and a half in La Sierra just outside of Riverside, and neither one of us liked the city.

So your first impression was that you liked Silver Peak. It was small. You said the houses were old.

Mostly, yes.

What did you find to live in? Did you live here right away?

Actually, we had made arrangements a few months ahead and rented a small house for, I think, about six weeks, until we bought a mobile home to live in.

And can you describe it? Was it one of the older houses?

Yes, it was very old. In fact, Harvey Humphrey owned it at the time, and he had installed an indoor bathroom for us before we moved in. Actually, it was across the street from Harvey's house.

And how big was it?

Two rooms, basically, with an enclosed porch that served as a second bedroom . . . living room-kitchen, kind of a combination.

What else was in town? What businesses do you recall?

There was one bar, the Shifting Sands, which was owned by Jim and Marie Gavin, and that's about it.

No gas station?

Harvey [Humphrey] sold gas. You had to go get him.

Explain how that worked.

Well, if you needed gas, you just went down and knocked on Harvey's door; and he came down, unlocked the pump, and sold you gas.

I see, but it wasn't like a gas station where somebody was there during regular hours or anything like that? You had to know to do that, right? Somebody passing through might not know this. [laughter]

Yes, you had to ask.

So gas was available, and there was a bar. Any other businesses here? With a hundred people, that's not very many.

Not that I recall. The post office, of course, was here. That's about it. Parsons Construction, which, at that time, he worked almost exclusively for Foote.

And Foote Mineral had been here before you got here, is that correct?

Yes, the company actually started here in about 1964, and its first production was about 1966 as Foote Mineral.

Was the school here at that time, 1971?

Yes, I believe that was the first year they moved from the old schoolhouse on Main Street up to the new building.

Really? The old schoolhouse, which is now the Vinegaroon Saloon?

Right. Right.

Did you have children when you came here?

We had one. The second was born after we came here.

I see, and was the first one of school age?

No, he was about eighteen months.

Was anything else here? Firefighting equipment, library What else was around?

Firefighting at that time was essentially Charlie Pearson. He had an old Studebaker truck with some hose on it that you could hook to the hydrants, and that was it.

Do you remember it ever being called out and used?

No, I don't. There was a volunteer fire department, and I joined sometime during 1971, and I've been active with the department ever since, essentially.

OK. What about water, electricity, sewer, garbage, and other kinds of services?

Water—at that time Foote supplied water, basically, for the whole town. Sewage was by septic tank, pretty much the way it is now. And the other services, you just got hooked up as you went.

TV? Radio?

TV . . . when we first came, there was one station. There was one translator. I believe it was KOLO out of Reno. There's a translator to the southwest of Silver Peak on a mountaintop. And then, I don't remember which winter, if it was 1971 or 1972, but the generator burned up, so we were without TV for a while. There was a TV district, and they got a bank loan to rebuild that translator and put in two more. Just about everybody from town went out and helped put up the buildings. We had three stations at that time.

Are they all out of Reno?

Yes.

All right. And radio? Do you recall?

I don't recall. We've never been much for radios.

Silver Peak didn't have a library at that time. I don't remember really when we did get the library. The building that it's in now has just been here a few years, but there was an older mobile home that the company donated and was the library building years before.

What was your reception by the hundred people who were here?

Actually, it was great. In a small-town atmosphere, everybody gets involved. Probably the first week of work I was asked to join the fire department and the Sportsmen's Club (at that time) and that sort of thing.

What's the Sportsmen's Club?

Just that. It was hunters, basically. I think it died pretty much during that year sometime, so it didn't last very long.

Was there something for your wife to join when she came here? Was there any formal group?

Not that I recall.

OK. Were there other families with small children around?

There were several, yes.

Were they people who had lived here for a while, or were they mostly Foote Mineral employees?

Mostly Foote employees, yes.

What did you do for fun?

Oh, we explored the mountains and the old mines. We still do that. Once the kids were in school, we taught 4-H and all of that sort of thing.

Are there Little League ball games or anything like that going on?

There was at one time. They did Little League, but it didn't last very long. Boy Scouts has been up and down over the years. At times you'd have two or three kids that are of the right age. Probably in ten years or better they haven't had 4-H.

Let's talk about changes over time. That's how everything looked when you first came here in 1971. How has it changed since you've been here, twenty-five years now?

Right. The town has grown. We were over five hundred at one point when

Sunshine was building up in the mid-1980s, I believe, and then just recently down to two hundred or so.

What happened to the town as it built up? Was there more housing here?

Yes. Sunshine Mining Company, when they started the mine up, they provided a lot of housing. All of their employees were offered the apartments that were up on the north side of town, available to rent. They also had a program where they would help purchase mobile homes.

Did Foote Mineral need to help their employees with housing?

What Foote has always done, and still does, is provide the trailer court. There is no charge and the utilities are at the same rate the company pays.

And is that just for employees?

Yes.

Where is that located?

Just to the south of the mill building right across the street. You go just to the south a little bit. That's all the trailer court up there.

Were there any more businesses in town when it got up to about five hundred people in the 1980s?

Yes, actually, my mother-in-law, Pat Reed, started a store—a little grocery store for bread and milk and that sort of thing. At one time we had three bars.

The Shifting Sands, and there were others?

Yes, the Vinegaroon. I forget what it was called at that time. It's been several different

things over the years. The schoolhouse was turned into a bar-restaurant-type thing.

And it's had several owners?

Right, and then the other one was out at the north end of town. It was called the Dead Coon Saloon, and it's now been purchased and turned into a residence.

Is that the Virtual Paradise house?

No. It's above that, a block off of Main Street.

OK, because I always laugh when I come into town and see the home that has some trees out in front and the sign, "The Virtual Paradise," because I think that must be someone who's on the Internet. [laughter]

Yes, right. [laughter]

That's a great place. So Silver Peak kind of grew in the 1980s, and then what happened? Sunshine was here until 1989, is that right, or 1990?

Yes, I believe so. And then they leased the mill to Zephyr, I believe it was, at that time, and they mined . . . actually, the Weepah Mine, which is a little richer in gold, out to the north in the Weepah hills. That kept things going. They didn't have as many employees, so things kind of declined. And then Homestead took over, and they dropped it even further and finally shut it down completely.

So then you were back to Foote Mineral as the only employer around here in the late 1980s to early 1990s? Up until Mineral Ridge, which is coming in right now and is the big change?

Right. Right.

Did the population go all the way back to a hundred? You said maybe two hundred people are here now?

Oh, no. I think there's about two hundred now, yes.

So it didn't drop completely. What did people do for jobs? Did the number of employees increase here at Foote Mineral?

Some, yes. We have had increases over the years. We've added a couple of new processes. The newest one is a hydroxide plant that just started this April, and that added about twenty employees to our roster.

This might be a good time to start talking about Foote Mineral. When you came here, what was your job, and what was the operation here?

I started as a laborer, and, basically, the operation was the same as it had been over the years. It was smaller. Most of what we have for a pond system now hadn't been built yet.

Can you describe the whole thing including what the product is?

Sure. We start with subsurface brines from the playa that contain lithium. We pump it to the surface.

Subsurface meaning groundwater?

Underground, yes. We pump to the surface, and it's just like water wells. The brine stays in the ponds for approximately a year, and then we have an operation out there called liming, and we add lime to the brine to precipitate magnesium. It takes about another year for it to get up to the strength for the plant, and then we bring it into the plant and, essentially, just

precipitate the lithium out of this as carbonate.

What you do is take the groundwater out, it settles, evaporates, and leaves what?

It leaves salts. The most abundant salt is sodium chloride, table salt. As it gets more concentrated, it starts to leave some potassium salts. Magnesium we have to remove, because it would precipitate as carbonate and be an impurity in our product.

And then what you are left with is . . . ?

Essentially, lithium chloride in solution with sodium and potassium chlorides.

And so the byproducts are the sodium and potassium chlorides?

Right.

What happens to those?

They're stockpiled out there. They collect in the ponds. In some of the smaller ponds, we mechanically remove the salts and put them in piles.

OK. So the only product coming out is the lithium?

Right.

And what is it used for? Who buys this?

Lithium carbonate is the base chemical for all other lithium chemicals. Here, now with the new plant, we take lithium carbonate and process it and turn it into lithium hydroxide. Foote has other plants in the east that take lithium carbonate and make lithium bromide and lithium chloride, lithium sulfate, lithium fluoride.

And is each one used in a different industry?

Yes. Lithium carbonate is used in glass and ceramics as a flux. The aluminum industry uses a lot of it as an enhancer in certain types of processes, to increase electrical efficiency in pots. Lithium chloride is used to produce lithium metal, and it's processed similar to chlor-alkali. And lithium metal, of course, is used in batteries and alloyed with aluminum for aircraft—special alloys and things. Lithium fluoride is used in welding-rod fluxes, that sort of thing. Several lithium compounds are used in pharmaceuticals. Lithium carbonate is used in the treatment of manic depressives.

OK, and that's the one that people are commonly aware of as a medication.

Right, and this product that we make here is not pharmaceutical grade. It gets reprocessed, actually, goes through hydroxide and back to carbonate to get a pharmaceutical grade.

Oh, I see. So what goes out of here goes more towards glass and metal industries, but some does get reprocessed and goes to pharmaceuticals?

Right.

So, basically, those three industries are where your market is, is that correct?

I can get you a copy of this.

We're looking at a flow chart, which I'll include in the file, but now explain to me what we're looking at.

We produce lithium carbonate both here and on the SCL plant in South America in Chile. Some of that is sold directly to

customers. Some of the bigger ones are Alcan, PPG [Pittsburgh Plate Glass], and Chemetall Gesellschaft, which is German. It's used in glass, ceramics, aluminum production, aluminum alloys, and pharmaceuticals. What is indicated here as Sunbright, that plant has been closed and relocated to Silver Peak, so here we also produce lithium hydroxide monohydrate, which is used in greases and other chemicals. And we also produce lithium hydroxide anhydrous, which is used in life-support systems. And the biggest customer there, of course, is NASA and Boeing. It's used as a CO₂ absorbent in spacecraft and submarines.

Now we actually have our metal toll produced from lithium chloride by DuPont, and then it goes to King's Mountain, North Carolina.

These are all of the products that come out of North Carolina?

Right. Lithium bromide is produced from carbonate by reaction with hydrobromic acid. And the customers there are Trane and Carrier, and it's used in air conditioning. It's a dehumidifier that absorbs water very rapidly. Lithium chloride brine has, actually, the same use in air conditioning, and it's also used in photo chemicals and industrial drying. Lithium fluoride is used primarily in welding-rod coatings. High-purity lithium carbonate is used in pharmaceuticals. And specialty lithium chemicals, we have several that are very small quantities. Then we have a metal-casting department, and there's two different grades of metal that we produce. What's produced for battery use has to be ultra-pure. And then, what's used in other alloys and things is a little lower purity. But we produce metal foil for batteries for Eveready, Duracell, et cetera. Batteries are for military and consumer and biomedical.

We have a little plant in New Johnsonville, Tennessee, that does organics, and we make normal and secondary butyllithiums which are primarily for pharmaceuticals.

Tell me what has happened in terms of your market prices. Have they stayed pretty steady? Have they continued to increase? What have you seen since you got here?

I don't really know. Sales and marketing are handled at our King's Mountain Corporate headquarters, so we don't get a lot of price data here.

Does the operation stay pretty stable here? I'm trying to get at the connection to the outside world, what impact that has on this operation.

Right. Our production levels go up and down based on world demand. The world demand is growing at a fairly steady rate. When we built the plant in Chile, it has a higher capacity than this one and also a little lower cost, so it tends to operate as much as possible. And then, this is the swing plant, so we do go up and down. The world market affects this industry more so, maybe, than just the national market. Right now there really are only two suppliers of lithium chemicals in the free world, and that is us and FMC [Food Machinery Corporation]. They have an open-pit, hard-rock operation in Bessemer City, North Carolina.

That's amazing to me, I guess, to find out there's only two suppliers, because these are fairly important industries that you're supplying. You're talking about air conditioning. You're talking about NASA's life-support systems, batteries, all kinds of pharmaceuticals. So these are pretty basic demands that are supplied by this company.

Right.

Because this company is the swing company, the production goes up and down. What happens to the employee base?

Not very much, really. We produce a few pounds more, a few pounds less, but we don't typically lay people off. It stays pretty steady.

About how many employees [were there] when you first came here? Do you recall?

I think probably in the forties . . . about forty, maybe forty-five.

And what is it today?

Right at seventy-five or seventy-six.

And it's staying pretty stable at that number right now?

Right.

Did this company have to deal with environmental regulations in getting set up and on an ongoing basis?

In the 1960s, the environmental regulation was a lot less than it is now. Now, we do have to have water-pollution control permits, air-quality operating permits. Actually, we're a licensed or permitted public water supplier by the state.

The regulation in the 1960s was not what it would be today if you were starting this operation?

Oh, right.

But on an ongoing basis, there are regulations on water, air, . . . anything else?

Well, of course, hazardous materials, hazardous wastes. We don't generate any hazardous wastes, but we still have to track our waste to demonstrate that they're not hazardous—all of the same thing you'd have to do if you were in Los Angeles or anywhere else. Basically, it's all federal law.

Let me ask about how you deal with some of the environmental problems that come from this business. For example, I drove out of town one day when I couldn't see a quarter of a mile in front of me. The salt flats were up in the air, so to speak.

Right.

How do you deal with that? Is that a side-effect of the work that you're doing?

No, basically, that's what Mother Nature does.

That would be happening whether you were here working or not?

Right. We have the sand dunes, and they move back and forth, almost across the valley. Anytime you get high winds, you get a lot of dust and visibility gets poor. But that's going to happen whether we're here or not. Actually, it would probably be worse if we weren't here, because we have a lot of the area in the valley covered with liquid.

What about the water table? Is the work that you're doing affecting the water table?

Currently, no. It has in the past. In the early years, they essentially pumped everything they could. Over the last ten or twelve years, we have stabilized, so, basically, we don't pump any more out of the ground than Mother Nature puts back in.

That's one of the things that you have to watch carefully, not to lower that water table now?

Right, but it does fluctuate some. Our goal (and it's not a regulatory requirement, but it's kind of an internal goal) is not to over pump, because it's detrimental to the future of the property.

The future of your business, as well as to people living here?

Right. Right.

Anything else in terms of the environmental regulations? Are there perceptions that there's damage being done, rather than that you're trying to hold things on a steady basis in terms of water?

Not that I've heard. Essentially, this whole area environmentally is relatively simple. The waters of this valley are not potable and cannot be made potable, because the naturally occurring TDS [total dissolved solids] is over 100,000 parts per million. Actually, in our water-pollution control permit, the state granted us an exemption on the water to the valley. We still, of course, are not allowed to spill hazardous things or contaminate, but basically everything that goes out there from this plant is the same thing that comes in. We change the ratios of the chemicals a little bit, but that's about all.

You said something interesting about the water, which is that you also supply the water for the town?

Used to. The county now has their own well, and they supply drinking water for the town. We do still supply water for our own trailer court, and we do maintain our permit as a public water supplier.

But when the company came here, there was no water system in town?

There was a water system. I understand the water was not potable. Most of the residents, or virtually all of the residents, were hauling water from the springs. When the company drilled their fresh-water well, the quality was good, the volume was fine, so they just tied in a line from the company's water-storage tank to the town's water-storage tank and supplied the water.

And then that changed somewhere along the way, and the county took that over for the town?

Right.

So it's through those wells that the town can get water. But are they able to drink the water?

Yes, it meets all of the national standards and the state standards. What we've done is gone up on the alluvial fan a ways, and the wells, both of them, are about two and a half miles out of town to the south. When you go up on the alluvial fan, what you get is a recharge aquifer that's coming down from Fish Lake Valley, and it's fresh water.

I see, so it has a different source. But I notice that people still haul or buy their drinking water to some extent in town.

Yes, there's a service, just like if you were in downtown L.A. There are people that bring water in and sell it, and there are people who buy it.

But it's not necessary?

No, our water meets all of the standards. It's just a matter of personal taste.

Does it taste different?

Well, yes, the TDS are a little over five hundred parts per million, I believe. The national standard is at five hundred parts per million. We're probably at six, but nowhere in the state of Nevada is under five, so the state has varied to, I think, 750 is allowable.

OK. So it's at Nevada's standard, but that's high compared to some of the other places in the nation.

Right. Yes.

Because water has always been a big issue for Nevada in general, but also for a little town like this where it's at a premium. I've talked to people who lived here in the 1930s, and they always hauled water. Even as recently as the 1950s, Alberta Merritt was telling me that Saturday was the day that they would take the big barrels, go up to the springs, and bring water down to the town. So it's always been an important issue to have enough water here.

Right, and that is still happening here. Some people still haul in water, and we've got a service that brings in bottled water.

Just in the time that you've worked here, have you seen changes in the regulations that affect this business?

Oh, yes. In the 1960s and early 1970s, there was very little regulation, almost none. In the last ten to fifteen years there has been a lot of federal legislation, which comes down to the state. As long as I can remember, we've had air-quality permits. I do that part for the company, and I inherited that from my predecessor. We never had to have a water-pollution control permit until, actually, during 1975 or so. We got what they call an NPDES [National Pollution Discharge Elimination Systems] permit,

which is really not applicable to Nevada, because it's for navigable water. But it was the closest thing that we could get to meet federal requirements.

Then in the 1980s, with all of the changes that were going on in environmental legislation, the state started a water-pollution control permit program. What we have to do is send in a permit application, which in our case was about that thick, about a ream [of] paper, and that's just providing them with enough information to make a decision on whether we should be operating or not.

What kind of information helps them with that decision? What's on that ream of paper that you provide?

Here, let me show you one. This is the permit application. There are sections. This is the cover sheet that tells who we are and the location; type of permit and our general activities for the property; size, surface area disturbance (we have 6,300 acres), water flow at peak activity. And we have to send in all relevant plans, specifications, designs . . . tell them where we're going to get our water; our sources of water; people who own land. We attach the list. This is a list by range and township of land that we're actually At that time we had mining claims that have since been patented—patented mining claims.

It looks like, for the most part, you're just telling the location, where you're operating, what you're doing, and that kind of thing. That's the type of information that helps them decide about the permit?

Right, and then we have to provide a geological assessment. We have to do maps—a geological map, geological survey. Weather data is required, and we have to actually research and go find out what our hundred-year event is and two hundred-

year event [weather related storms] and all that sort of thing. We have to send samples that have to be tested, so that we can determine if we're going to have problems with contamination and toxic leach procedures that the federal government came out with. Virtually everything we use out here that can leach into the ground has been tested.

So they can see what might get back into the water?

That ensures, yes, that we aren't going to contaminate the water with heavy metals or insecticides or poisons or that sort of thing. You have to have an engineering design report, and a good part of this is engineering design. And now part of that is, if you have an above-ground tank, there's a federal requirement that you have secondary containment in case that tank leaks. The containment has to be able to hold 110 percent of the volume of the largest tank that's been cited. It's fairly complicated.

They really get a lot of detail on the operation in order to make their decision?

Right. Right.

And tell me about your job now. Because you started out as a laborer, how did you arrive at this point where you're handling all of these things?

I worked in the plant as an operator for probably two and a half or three years. Then I went into the laboratory as a technician. I was senior chemist, and I was technical engineer for a while, then plant chemist. Actually, just about four years ago I moved back into the production side and took over as production superintendent.

As production superintendent, part of your job is to deal with all of these permitting processes?

Actually, that function has followed me through several jobs. I've had it since I was the senior chemist in technical engineering.

Tell me, how long is this operation planned for in this area, because it must be similar to mining in that, at some point, the production is finished. Is that correct?

Right, the resource is not infinite. When I started about twenty-five years ago, they told me we had about twenty years. We're still saying we have about twenty years.

Really? So there's more product here than you originally thought?

Well, if you're mining hard rock, you go out and drill a hole, and you sample, and you can block out the ore, and you know exactly what you have. What we have here is a fluid, and it moves. We use some statistical analysis to determine what our reserves are. That changes based on several factors, one of which is that the more we pump, the total amount of lithium in the brine decreases—the parts per million in the brine decreases. So you just take an arbitrary number and say that's an economic lower limit. And then, you project when you're going to hit that number, and it depends on production rates. The lower the production rate we have, actually, the longer the property will last. And we try to manage from a standpoint of optimizing reserves and the decline curve, that sort of thing.

At this point, do you have a projection of about how long this operation will be here?

Yes, but the best we can do is anywhere from twenty to thirty-six years, because it's a statistical projection.

Are there environmental regulations that require you to have a plan of how you will leave the property?

That's also required by both federal and state law in the plan of operation. We have a shut-down procedure. I'm not really up-to-date on what's in that at the moment, because the guy that does the land issues was handling that, and he recently transferred. We're right in the middle of a process of getting the state and the federal governments and all of us to agree on what is going to work. The federal Bureau of Land Management [BLM] has some control over the land as mining claims. The state obviously has an interest in the environmental impact, and what each requires is actually different in a lot of respects. There always has been a plan, but the legal requirements of what's going to have to be contained have changed a lot over the last ten years. So we have to actually negotiate between the state and the BLM and find a medium ground between what each is going to require, because there are some fairly major differences in the requirements.

Is that also an ongoing process? I can imagine that if it's changed this much in twenty-five years, it's going to change again in another twenty-five years.

Yes, sure.

So, it's one of the jobs that must be created in your organization due to the regulations. You have to have somebody to deal with that.

Right. Somebody has to continually update that and follow regulations.

So that, if you closed tomorrow, you're in compliance? Or if you close thirty-five years from now, you're in compliance?

Right. Right, and we do know what their requirements are for closing water wells, which essentially is what we have, and we're accruing for that now. We have to actually fill the column of the well with mud and cement, you know, bentonite clays and cement to prevent leakage and that sort of thing. We had done some. It's kind of an ongoing thing. It's something that we can do now.

As you go, because your wells move as the work . . .

We have to drill new wells every few years, because the geology of the basin . . . it's fairly fluid. It's all alluvium. We get some movement, and we shear off wells, or we collapse a casing, and so wells have to be replaced. I think, over the life of the property right now, we drilled more than three hundred holes out there. We don't operate usually more than forty at a time.

I see. But that's what it's taken just to keep up with the movement in the area.

Right. Right.

That's interesting. I'm going to switch back to Silver Peak, and one of the things I forgot to ask about is the swimming pool in town. Was that here when you got here in 1971?

No, that was built in, I think, it was 1974, 1975 . . . in that area.

And how did that get built, because it belongs to the community, correct?

It actually belongs to Foote Mineral, Cyprus. We built the pool. In the mid-1970s, the management actually polled the town and said, "What would you like to have? There's nothing for the kids to do here, especially in the summertime." They asked not just employees, but everybody in town,

and the swimming pool was the big winner, so the company did build a pool and has kept it open for the whole town.

Were there other things that this company has contributed to the town over the years?

Yes. Every year they contribute a good deal of money to emergency services—the ambulance, fire department.

Is there an ambulance here now?

Yes. The ambulance service, when we first came here, was an old hearse—if you could find a guy to drive it. At that time, a lot of the ambulances and hearses were the same type of vehicle. In the 1970s, the state started the EMT [Emergency Medical Technician] program, and the county [Esmeralda] bought a new ambulance in 1973. My wife and I were EMTs . . . not the first year, but about the second or third year of the program. That has continued and expanded to where we now have some of the capabilities very similar to what you have in big cities with paramedic crews. Our ambulance people now can start IVs. They just got defibrillators or are just in the process of getting the defibrillation equipment. We now have two ambulances in town, fully equipped.

And improvements in the fire department, a different fire truck?

Yes. We had the old Studebaker. Again, somewhere in the late 1970s we got a federal fire truck that was surplus from the navy, off of one of the bases. We used that up until about a year and a half ago. We had a fire truck custom-built in Tonopah. We have a new firehouse, because the new truck would not fit in the old house. We just found out last week that we've got another fire truck coming. We bid on a surplus truck from California. We got it: it'll be here in a couple

of weeks. We hope to start the fire rescue part, highway response to accidents, and that sort of thing. The company, in cooperation with the county and the local emergency planning committee, has formed a Hazmat response team and a rescue team, basically, because federal law (OSHA) says, if the county can't provide rescue from confined space and certain other things, the company must. Obviously, the county can't afford the equipment that's required, so we've formed this cooperative, and it's working quite well. We've got about ten people now who are trained for Hazmat technician-level response. We've got about twelve or fourteen people that are rope-rescue trained, rappelling and that sort of thing. And the next step is the actual confined-space rescue training, and that's happening within the next few months.

Have you been involved in all of that, since you already had the EMT certification?

In one way or another. I was an EMT instructor up until 1981, and then I quit. My wife still is. She's one of the co-directors for emergency medical services for the county and coordinator for the Silver Peak ambulance. I am still involved with the fire department. I'm training officer, and I'm also a part-time deputy sheriff, so that's plenty to keep me busy. [laughter]

The whole time that you have been working here at Cyprus, you are also on call as deputy sheriff and for emergency fires and so on?

Right. Right.

How busy are those other jobs? Do you get quite a few calls?

The fire department—we probably average about one or two calls a year. Biggest problem we have is keeping the

training active, so that when you do get a call, people know what they're doing. The sheriff's office—I probably average a hundred hours a year, seventy-five to a hundred hours a year.

And that's all on-call basis, is it?

Yes, I work when they call me. It's usually for accidents and things like that.

You've got two ambulances here now. Are there quite a few calls for that?

They probably average twenty a year. A lot of those are motor-vehicle accidents on the highway. We cover halfway to Mina and halfway to Tonopah, halfway to Goldfield this way and halfway . . . There's a halfway point with Fish Lake Valley, out Highway 6 towards Bishop.

OK, as well as residents here in Silver Peak. Those are important services. Although there are not many calls, when they're needed, they're desperately needed, and that is something that the company and the county are working together to provide out here?

Yes, right.

You mentioned the new hydroxide plant. Could you just talk a little bit about that? That's something new that's been added to this company?

Yes. We had a plant in Sunbright, Virginia, that produced lithium hydroxide from lithium carbonate. That plant was dated from the 1950s. It was very old. It needed a lot of capital to upgrade it. So when they looked at that, we looked at the amount of freight, the money we're spending on freight just to ship the lithium carbonate from here back there, and made the decision that it was probably better to build

a new plant here than to refurbish the old plant back there. And that's what was done. We started production in April of 1996. We're still kind of in shakedown mode.

It's almost like two operations here now, is that right?

Yes, it is.

Because you'd talked about starting with forty employees when you were here in 1971. Now you're up to seventy some?

Right.

And is that addition bringing in new people for that new plant?

Right. At least twenty of those are directly for the new plant. There have been some changes in playa operations. They were bigger and a little bit smaller. It varies, depending.

What other changes in the company have you seen?

In 1988, we were bought by Cyprus Minerals, which is why we are Cyprus Amax Minerals now. That gave us access to a larger capital-reserve fund, so it's actually been easier for us to make improvements and get access to capital money that we needed than before.

Any major changes in personnel at the time that Cyprus bought Foote?

No, it's ongoing. The average operations manager is only here three years, so . . .

Is this a training ground for somewhere else?

It just seems to be the way it has worked out within the company, three to four years.

If someone wants to stay here, is it possible to do that?

Sure.

What about you? You've been here twenty-five years, and you're an important part of the community. You prefer to stay?

I'd say so, yes. We like it here. All of the plants that we can transfer to are on the east coast. Neither the wife nor I really want to go back East.

Yes, plus you've raised two children here. I met your . . . is it your oldest son? And your granddaughter. You have a granddaughter now.

Right. Right.

And you have another son? Two sons?

Yes. Yes, the youngest son is in southern California. He's a fireman paramedic.

Oh, I see. And what is Dennis Jr. doing here?

He's a mechanic here for the company.

As far as changes, the big bump in population was when Sunshine was here in the 1980s. It's kind of gone back down a little bit. What do you expect with Mineral Ridge coming in? Do you think there's going to be a big change again?

I don't think it will be as big, because the way I understand their plans, they're not going to have that big of an influx of people all at one time. The times that we've had some problems have been when there were a lot of construction workers staying in town, and then we get the bar fights in the evenings and that sort of thing.

I see. Then your deputy-sheriff work increases, right?

Right. Right. [laughter]

But you're not expecting that this time around?

We haven't seen anything yet, no. I don't know how many they're going to have. My understanding is that a lot of them are not going to live in Silver Peak.

They are going to live elsewhere and commute?

Yes, right.

So the problems, if there are any, may go elsewhere, too?

Right.

With two main employers in town, Cyprus Foote and Mineral Ridge, how does that work? Do you hire similar types of employees? Is there competition for employees at all?

Probably not. There are some areas, like the mechanics and electricians, where there's some overlap, but we really are so different from mining that, no, there's not a lot of competition. And there normally is not much of a labor pool in Silver Peak anyway. We have to look outside to hire.

Are there any cooperative ventures on behalf of the town between the two companies? Or do you foresee any?

Not at this point, but we've had indications from Mineral Ridge that they will contribute to the ambulance and the fire department at about the same level as Foote has done, so that will be a big help.

This may be a real difficult question to answer, but it seems to me what I hear is that a company comes in and really becomes a part of the town, really gets involved in helping the town, and it's very much intermeshed, whereas maybe in larger towns that may or may not happen to such an extent. It seems to be a part of being so isolated out here.

Right. Well, when you have a total population of five hundred people, and half of the jobs are with one company and half with another, that's really all there is. And the county is not a rich county. They don't have a lot of money for parks and things like that. Most of that comes from donations from the companies.

So, it's even more necessary for companies to get involved. Plus, other services

are Tonopah is an hour away. Hawthorne is an hour and a half.

Right, and it's beneficial to the companies to have things that will attract people to stay.

Right—schools, libraries, swimming pools.

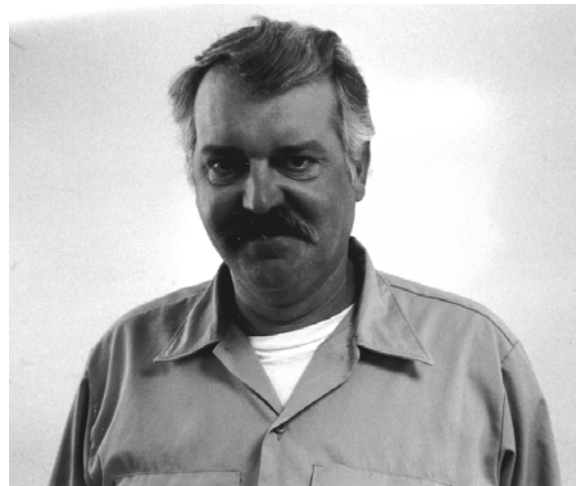
Right.

Tell me, if you had to kind of sum up the importance of Silver Peak in your life, what would you say it is?

Well, I think when we came here, we found a home.

BEN VILJOEN

AT THE TIME of Ben Viljoen's 1996 oral history interview, most mining in Nevada was open pit, similar to what Mineral Ridge Resources, Inc. planned for the old Drinkwater and Mary mines. However, Ben loved underground mining, a skill he learned through years of hard work and listening to old-timers. Self-described as a garden tramp miner [one who changes jobs frequently to learn new skills but prefers to stay in one state], he did learn open-pit mining and also had experience operating his own small contracting business. Ben's oral history includes insight into the famous Mohawk Mine cave-in; the tight-knit community which exists among Nevada miners; and changes in state and federal regulations and their impact on small mining operators and businesses, as well as how he coped with the many changes in the mining industry. From Ben's curiosity about the history of mining, he had also gathered a wealth of Silver Peak's folklore—stories that had been passed down through the years.



VICTORIA FORD: Today is July 22, 1996, and I'm here with Ben Viljoen. Am I pronouncing that correctly?

BEN VILJOEN: It's Viljoen [pronounced Fay-une].

OK. And we are at Mineral Ridge Resources' office in Silver Peak, Nevada. Let's start with a little bit of your background and talk about your connection to Nevada. You said you also have a Lake Tahoe

connection. Would you tell me a little bit about that?

My dad and my grandparents were there in the early days of Lake Tahoe.

Now, is this the grandfather who came from South Africa?

Right. My grandfather came to this country after the Boer Wars. My dad was born at Lake Tahoe. My grandfather was in communications, so my grandmother was the first telephone operator in the Tahoe basin, and he was a lineman for the phone company.

Will you give me your grandparents' names?

Gene Viljoen and Lillian Viljoen from Camp Richardson. He had a shipping business up there, and he and his partner, Lloyd Saxon, had a couple of resorts on and off. But the main thing was his shipping business.

And your father was born there?

Right. He was born at Camp Richardson, Tahoe.

What year was he born?

Oh, I think 1926. Yes, and my grandmother showed up there before, when my granddad was still in South Africa. She was from Orland, California, but worked at Fallen Leaf Lake at the Glen Alpine Resort on the west side of Lake Tahoe. She was a waitress when she was like about thirteen or fourteen years old, so she was there for a long time.

So they met there?

No. My grandfather was in the first world war, and his best friend . . . they had promised each other if one was killed, the other would tell the family what happened. And as it turned out, his buddy was killed. When he went and told the family about it, that's where he met my grandmother. Then they married and went to Tahoe from there.

You love mining, it seems, from talking to you during my tour today. How did you get into the mining business?

Because the only business at Tahoe then was logging, until the Olympics came through, and then all of a sudden everybody was . . . instead of lumberjacks, it was tennis players and tourists of every sort. Everybody talked about how wonderful logging was, and those horrible miners that had come from Virginia City and stayed drunk and did God only knows what all and then went back to Virginia City. And I thought, "Boy, that doesn't sound that horrible to me. All we do is work around here." [laughter]

Then, as kids, in the fall of the year we bought all the groceries to get us through the winter, so we'd go to Placerville to get produce, and then we'd go Reno for clothing and meat and that sort of thing. And from time to time, we'd get to go to Virginia City, and that was always really something for us.

What years would that have been? You were born when?

Nineteen fifty-three.

So in the late 1950s . . . early 1960s?

Yes, 1960s. Of course, we met friends that are still friends to this day from Virginia City, and their folks were in the mining business, and most of them still are. As things died out, at least for our lifestyle at Tahoe, the next step was most of our family

moved to Montana and Canada and different places. But I had to be near the Comstock, I guess.

It attracted you from the time you were a kid then?

Yes, as far back as I can recall.

You can remember the trips to Virginia City.

Right. The Highway to the Sky—that's what they used to call Geiger [Geiger Grade]. And, boy, that was well worth behaving for a month or two to go up there. [laughter]

Interesting. So did you go to school at Tahoe?

No. During the winter we'd go down around Salinas and Carmel Valley and the Monterey area [California], and that's where I went to school. During all holidays and summers we'd go back to Tahoe. So I always got to start school later than the other kids, and then I got out of school earlier. As soon as the snow thawed, we were gone. We were lucky that way. I always just hated the Monterey and Carmel area, because we were outsiders. We were Tahoeites, and we just had absolutely nothing in common with artichoke farmers. [laughter]

Hard to feel like you fit in?

We absolutely didn't.

Yes. So when did you start in the mining business then? After high school?

Oh, no. I think my first job mining was at the Utah Mine in Virginia City. I think I was about thirteen, hand-mucking during the summer, so I got to be away from home and

get paid, and it seemed just too much fun. Oh, I loved it.

Hand-mucking. Most people wouldn't think that was a lot of fun.

Well, after setting choke in the woods, and your uncle pays in candy bars, and these guys paid real money, that was something. [laughter]

That was a good deal, then. [laughter] And you said that most of your training has been on the job? Can you give me a little bit of detail about what that means?

Right. Well, my folks begged and pleaded for me to go to UNR [University of Nevada, Reno], but I convinced them that it'd be a good idea to get some practical experience first. So I just went to work in the mines in Virginia City, and then from there, as things died out around there, I just tramped around from mine to mine, mainly working underground. And so it's only been here recently that I've had to work in [open] pits. As one mine shuts down, because the price of the mineral goes down or else they work it out, I just gather up and go on to the next one. And it's a never-ending cycle.

Since starting at the Utah Mine in Virginia City, has it all been in Nevada?

Oh, no. I worked in Arizona and rustled jobs in Colorado—I never actually worked there—and then worked a number of different places in Washington. So 90 percent has been Nevada, mainly because I'm what they refer to as a garden tramp [miner] or a tri-county tramp—not the guy that goes from coast to coast. If there's any jobs in Nevada, I'd just prefer to stay here. But from time to time, I have to leave the state, plus to round out my skills. The shaft jobs were in Arizona, and I wanted to know more about shafts, so that's why I migrated

down there for a short stay. And then up around Liberty in Washington to mine underground placer, because that's something I hadn't done before. And then I worked up near Twisp for a short while—Washington state, up around Wenatchee area. So it's just moving around all the time.

So for an underground miner, before you could call yourself a contract miner or a real miner, it takes about ten years of practical experience and moving around a lot to learn all the different jobs. Or you could just stay at one mine, which those guys are referred to as a factory tramp, which means one guy hired out at a mine and just stayed there forevermore. But then you don't have the rounded background to know how things are done in different places and what different situations you might get into.

Not as marketable if you've just worked in one place, in one job?

Right, because you do everything wrong just the way they did it wrong there; and you don't know why it's wrong, you just know it's wrong. So the idea is, if you hit a lot of different places, then you know easier, cheaper ways to accomplish or get around a problem.

And each place has different challenges? Different solutions?

Sure. The ground is different. Even up and down the Comstock the ground is different in almost every mine.

OK. You said you came to Silver Peak first in 1976?

About that, yes, 1975, 1976, when the Mohawk silver mine was going, which was about the last of the old-type mines where they had the big bunkhouses and cook shack. All that's gone by the wayside. Since then, they've come out with trailer houses,

but that was great staying in those big, old bunkhouses. And the cook shack—they charged a dollar and a half a day for your groceries [meals], and you couldn't possibly eat everything that was there, so that was quite an experience. That was ten days on and four off; and no women, no booze allowed in camp; and you were just there until the end of your hitch. Then you're gone.

And so what job brought you to the Mohawk? What were you doing?

Underground mining, and then the mine was changing hands. The outfit I worked for was Spring Creek Mines, which belonged to Jack Zane and Mark Gavard, two pretty well-known promoters in this area. I'd known Jack Zane long before coming down. And they were selling the mine to an outfit called Beta Grand that sent their big-shots up, and they were going to do this, and they were going to change that, and on and on. Spent all this money, but they never talked about upgrading the mine—it was all surface stuff. So my partner and I thought, "It sounds like a promotion. We better cash our checks while we can and get out of here." It did operate for quite some time after we left, but at the time we thought, just the way these people were talking, that it was just a big stock scam and we'd better vamoose, which we did.

We went from there to mining barite over at Candelaria. Right after that I went back to Virginia City when the Savage Mine opened up and worked there until it shut down.

So the first time you were in Silver Peak was about how long?

About a year, almost a year.

And then you came back to Silver Peak when?

Nineteen eighty-nine.

So it had been thirteen, fourteen years since you'd been here?

Yes.

What kind of changes did you see in the town when you came back?

I was really amazed how much Sunshine [Sunshine Mining Company] had put into the town. Most mining companies like to keep a low profile, and they get a bad rap for tearing everything up, and nobody ever notices the new fire trucks or the new water tank—the things that they just buy for the town, and they don't want anybody to really know. But Sunshine had gone above and beyond the call of duty. Silver Peak, at least in my mind, was just a ghost town at that earlier time. They had the Foote trailer court, where it always has been, and their mill. And then there was the Shifting Sands Bar, which had about six bar stools in it, and no one was ever there except Jimmy Gavin, the guy that ran the place. Driving through town you'd see a light on here and there where some old-timers lived, and other than that, it was caved-in buildings and cardboard blowing around and just a ghost town.

And then coming back, my gosh, here there were three bars open. The Shifting Sands was closed, and the Black Mammoth had been completely rebuilt, which was a deserted, old building when we were here. Now it's the Miner's Inn, that adobe building. And then the Vinegaroon which, when we were here before, was an abandoned school house. The Vinegaroon was now a bar with a little restaurant in it. And then another one called the Dead Coon Saloon, which isn't operating anymore. Here's all these businesses—a little motel built.

And it was because of the Sunshine Mining Company?

Right. It operated the Sixteen-to-One, which at that time the mill and everything had been leased to an outfit called Zephyr Resources. But Sunshine upgraded the whole town water system. They had the power lines and everything redone in town, so that they had power again. All of a sudden there was a fire department here with new, real, workable trucks, and an ambulance service—you know, all of the backbone that makes a community function, which I really think Sunshine deserves a slap on the back for, and they probably didn't get the credit they deserved.

But just that one mining company that had come into town and took an interest in the community had made a big difference in addition to providing jobs. So you could really see a change?

Right. Like night and day.

And is that kind of typical of the mining boom and bust?

Right, yes. Just a wild guess, I'd say there were maybe fifty or seventy-five residents when I was here in the 1970s, and then when I came back, there were probably close to three hundred residents. And, of course, Foote Mineral had expanded, so they'd grown besides. And then all the people Sunshine had brought in, which turned into Zephyr and then later Homestead and now Mineral Ridge.

And so Silver Peak, right now, is in a boom?

No, it's in a down side. It's when the construction starts up at the mine that things will start popping.

So even though there were about three hundred people in 1989, then it went downhill again?

Oh, yes. It's probably half the people living here now.

I see. But within the next six months or so, that'll all change again.

Yes. A couple hundred people will probably come to town, so it'll come right back alive.

This time when you came to town, you bought a home and brought your family here. Is that right?

Well, I lived in company housing [that Homestead Minerals leased from Sunshine Mining Company] while the mine was operating. When the mine shut down, everything was being sold—trailers and property—fairly cheap. And I was involved in a lot of the pit planning, and I knew that it wasn't the mine that caused the big shutdown; it was corporate mismanagement of the money. And I figured as good a mine as the Mary is, that while everybody's frantically selling property, it'd be a good time to buy some, because nobody's going to let a mine like that sit too awfully long. And so far it looks like I'm right. [laughter]

And we've talked about whose house that was.

Right. Fred Vollmar's home, a very famous promoter out in this area. Silver Peak's answer to Graham Rice and George Wingfield and those guys, because he was always bringing new money into the area. In fact, the house itself was built by the Warner Brothers. He had conned them into what a wonderful idea it would be to have a little hideout that they could come to and bring some of their favorite secretaries along and

have fun in the sun during the winter. After they lost interest in partying and lost a lot of money in the mining business, they sold the house to him and went back to Hollywood and gave up on Silver Peak.

This is one of the stories that's told around this area about Fred? Because I think there must be a lot of stories about him.

Oh, yes, like everybody says, when he was on top of the world (as he'd put it), he ate steak, his buddies ate steak, and his dogs ate steak. And when he was under the world, well, then he and his dogs ate rabbit. [laughter]

[laughter] Gives you an indication. I want to switch a little bit, because I know we'd like to tell stories all afternoon about Fred Vollmar. But we've just gone on a tour of Silver Peak and up to the Drinkwater and Mary, where the new open-pit mine is going to be. And we've seen what's left of the Cord Mill. I'd like to have you talk a little bit about what has taken place in this town. You mentioned that at first there were several smaller mills built in this area. Could you talk a little bit about how it progressed up to the Cord Mill?

Originally, the ore was brought down from the mines by wagon into town here, where there were a whole bunch of mills—at least six or seven of them—which were amalgamation mills and gravity-type mills. Well, first of all, they were stamp mills, and then the material, after it's crushed by the stamps, comes out through the screen across amalgam sheets. These amalgam sheets are copper sheets that are covered with mercury. And as the material flows across the sheet, mercury sticks to copper, and then gold sticks to mercury. So as it would build up with mercury, then it's taken off with putty knives, retorted, and the gold's left behind. The mercury goes into a

vapor, and then it's condensed back to be reused again. The gold's recovered that way. And then from there it would go onto tables or a sluice box or something—some gravity method—to separate. Since gold's heavier than rock, the gravity method would drop the gold out, in principle.

Now, they weren't very efficient in this area [Mineral Ridge Mining District], because the gold is so darn fine that the gravity didn't help. The particles . . . the size of the gold is, I believe, about four hundred mesh, which is four hundred holes per square inch in a screen. So it's very, very fine, and the gold didn't have enough surface area to be caught by the mercury. And then it was such a small particle size that, even though it's heavier than the surrounding rock, the surrounding rock was still heavier because of the size of it.

So the gravity method was never very successful until the turn of the century when the cyanide method came out, and the Silver Peak-Pittsburg Company built the mill out at Blair. That was a 110-stamp mill, had a capacity of 500 tons a day, and that was their downfall. The grade of the ore here in those times was so low-grade that they had to make up for it in volume in order to show any kind of a profit. So they geared their mill at 500 tons a day, which was more than the Mary was able to produce at any kind of grade. In order to produce a .3 head grade, they could only produce about 300 to 350 ton a day, and the mill demanded 500. So the only way they could bring enough mill feed to keep the place operating was to lower the grade. It was unacceptably low-grade ore that was being shipped to the mill, and finally they went broke.

Another problem they had is the mill was built in the infancy of the cyanide method, so it was an antique before it even operated.

Because this was at the very beginning of that technology?

Right.

It was . . . in fact, we've read several different places, it was the first or one of the first in this area. [Interviewer error in this question. It was John Chiatovich's mill, built in 1893, that is considered to be one of the first cyanide mills in Nevada and possibly in the West.]

The credit [for the first cyanide mill] goes to the Donovan Mill in Silver City. It's still intact. Mike Donovan owns it now. His dad was a famous mill man in that area, and he loves showing his mill off, if anybody's interested.

That's where the first cyanide process was tried?

The very first test was over at Washoe Lake. UNR ran some tests over there to see if it would work at all, and it did. Then they decided to try it in the practical application and did it at the Donovan Mill re-running tails, and it worked out very well. And then they decided to go ahead and actually design a mill around this new process. This [the Blair Mill] would have been one of those mills, if not the first, that was actually designed to use the cyanide method.

Let's talk about the cyanide process and describe the Cord Mill, which was a more efficient mill. What I'd like you to do is to go through step by step how the ore was brought in and then how that process worked, because we've looked at the remains of both of those mills.

OK. The principle on both of them was the same. The Cord was a lot more modern. It was built, I think, in 1936, using a ball mill instead of stamps, which gives a lot finer grind. Of course, the electric motors and pumps were a lot more efficient. Their precipitation part of it had been refined a

hundredfold since the earlier one. So basically what happened—they would bring the ore from the Mary Mine.

To the Cord Mill?

Actually, to be more honest about it, at that time the mine was divided in half. The Black Mammoth ore came out and was shipped by truck and wagon from the mine to their mill here in Silver Peak. And then the other half of the mine was called the Prescott Lease, which was owned by E.L. Cord, the famous automobile tycoon. They built their mill on-site. So the ore came out of the portal, went over into the coarse-ore bins, and from there it would go through a primary crusher or a big jaw crusher.

Which is what we saw at the very top of that ridge?

Right. That was their coarse-ore bin. Down that hole below it would have been where that jaw crusher sat that broke it down from run-of-mine [directly from the mine], which would be anything from a foot or eighteen inches around down to sand. And it would go through that jaw crusher and be all crushed down to one size, which was probably three-quarters-minus of an inch. [Everything was smaller than three-quarters of an inch.] And then it went to the fine-ore bins Well, from there it actually went through another crusher, probably a cone or something (if I could find a flow sheet, I'd tell you for sure), which would break it from three-quarters-minus down to probably about three-eighths-minus. And then from there, it went into the fine-ore bin, which would be fed into the ball mill. And what came out of the ball mill was probably about a hundred mesh.

And the ball mill took the place of the old stamps? That's what turned it into the fine powder?

Right.

And when you say a hundred mesh . . .

That's a hundred holes per square inch in a screen. So that's about the same consistency as flour. Of course, it's got water with it, and it can't come out of the ball mill until it can fit out through the screen. From there it would go to a classifier. It's a rake-type classifier. It was pretty common in those days, and anything over a hundred mesh would be fed back into the ball mill. Anything under would go on into the mill itself. From there it would go into thickeners, because you don't have that much control over the density coming out of the mill—you just want it ground up as quickly as possible and get it out of there.

And what happened in the thickeners?

It's a big, huge tank with a mud pump on the bottom. It has rakes that slowly move around in the bottom of the tank, forcing the mud toward the middle to where it's pumped out. And they move very, very slowly. It's, I think, one r.p.m. every four minutes or something—just slowly moving around so that everything can settle out of the solution. And that water would go straight to the precip room to precipitate the gold out of it. I shouldn't say mill water—it's a cyanide solution.

Out of these tanks, it's cyanide solution coming out?

Well, out of the ball mill. That's what you feed into the ball mill. Most of your reaction takes place in the ball mill, because it's hot in there because of the friction. It's being well aerated because of the cascading action of the material going around and around.

So that's where the cyanide picks up the gold. Is that correct?

About 80 percent of your gold is caught right there, and then the material from that point goes into agitator tanks, where it's agitated Well, I was thinking of CCD [counter current decantation], that type of a sand-leach type mill. From there it would be pumped into tanks, and they have a sprinkler going around on top running more cyanide solution over it. From there it would be shoveled out into agitator tanks.

They just kept repeating the process. That's why there's row after row of tanks going down the side of the hill—they just kept repeating the process until they felt they had a good enough recovery, or they'd recovered everything they possibly could, which was, in those days, right around 90 percent. They were very efficient.

So after it had gone through all of these tanks, until they'd recovered as much as they possibly could out of it, what was the next step?

Well, one thing we left out is they had a flotation circuit in there, which was rare in these mills around here. The main reason they had a flotation circuit is they bought the mill from the Como Mining Company over at Como out of Dayton, and it was a flotation mill. So they got a good deal on this mill, moved it over here, and then rebuilt it to a cyanide mill. The reasoning for the flotation was that they felt that the deeper they got into the ore body Normally, in most mines the deeper you get, you get into more and more sulfides. So they were kind of planning ahead, although they never got into enough sulfides up here to really make a difference. But at least they had that possibility, and they were prepared for it. And they were able to scalp off the pyrites and any sulfides that could have caused any problems with the cyanide process.

Because you said when those two got together, what happened?

Well, the sulfides with the cyanide make hydrocyanic gas, and that's a deadly poison.

Which is the type of thing used . . .

In the gas chamber. It's got no odor. You can't see it, and it'll just knock you down right now.

And that flotation circuit was what took care that?

Scalped all that out of the ore so that there wouldn't be a problem.

What happened next?

Well, your tails go to tails, which in those days they spread out over a big, wide area, because sunlight and oxygen neutralizes cyanide within hours.

Which we can see all across the valley floor, correct?

Right.

Would that have been going into water back then?

Well, that was from the mill out at Blair. Yes, they say there was a little lake out in there. It went out like that.

That was the Blair Mill. The Cord Mill went down the canyon.

Through that canyon and spread out over the alluvial fan in the valley, which people say that's how the miners tear up the country and cause ecological problems and on and on. But there was a reason behind it, and that was to neutralize any cyanide. They did anything humanly possible and affordable to recover the cyanide, because it was so darn expensive and still is, that they didn't want to just throw it away. So they

recovered every bit they possibly could, and then any that was still left in the tails would quickly be neutralized in the sunlight and with the wind blowing on it. Normally, it just took a couple of hours. Today, you can see people having their picnic lunch out in the middle of the tailings, and the dog didn't drop dead or anything, so it's not a problem.

Then the other solution, usually, they'll take it off right at the primary thickener, but they'll just put it all into one package to make it quicker and easier. According to these pictures, they used the press method. They had Merrill-Crowe presses or socks [filters] which . . . you take your cyanide solution, you bring it back to the precip room—that was that caged-in room—because it was so valuable.

Right. It just looked like a small, ten-by-ten-foot square wire cage?

Right. That's to keep people from high-grading the precip, because it was pure gold.

High-grading means taking it?

Stealing it, yes. But it'll look like a gray mud. Kind of looks like a cement that's gotten a little bit wet or something. You'd never think it was worth anything to look at it.

Then they would bring the solution back to the precip room in order to . . . The chemical reaction has already taken place—the gold is in solution with the water, so to speak, and that's called pregnant solution. It comes into the precip room, and then you have to get the cyanide to go to zinc instead of gold. You have to put it under a vacuum, pull the oxygen back out of it, and then hit it with zinc. Cyanide'll drop the gold and pick up the zinc, and it's [a] pretty good swap, because I forget what the price of zinc is these days, but it's real dirt cheap, and you'll get thirty-two ounces of gold out of a pound of zinc. So it's a pretty nice swap.

The gold is then collected in these filters, which in the pictures are just a series of plates with a canvas cloth on them. The solution is pumped through that row of filters, and as the precip drops out, it's just skimmed out and sticks to those filters. Then the filters or the press is taken apart, and they're scraped off and washed, and then that precipitate or the gray mud is taken to the refinery. (Where we were looking, it was that big building with the room with the cement floor.) That is put into the furnace and cooked or heated until it becomes molten metal and poured out into what they call doré, which is a combination of all the metals that are picked up, because the cyanide also grabs silver and copper and anything else. If it's a prospector selling it, it's called a miner's brick, because it's usually pretty dirty. Out of a mill like that, it's called doré, so there it's about 50 percent silver, 50 percent gold, and a little trace of who knows what all. And then in those days that was shipped to the mint. Today, it's sent to a refinery where they cook it down in acid, and it ends up as nine-nine-nine gold or nine-nine-nine silver, or on down the line. But it's all done chemically.

OK. One of the interesting things—after it came out of the press room, there was a cement floor, but there was a section of it that was gravel instead [of] cement. And you mentioned the reason for that.

Right. That was in case you spill any molten gold or slag, the moisture in the cement'll cause it to explode, so they have dry sand in there to keep that from happening. A lot [of] times the slag is just poured off onto the ground, because it's just glass. That's fluorspar and borax and what the heck else? That just picks up a lot of the dirty stuff that's in your precip that you don't want in your doré, and then you end up with a green glass which is useless.

Usually, that's all gathered up after it's cooled and rerun through the mill in case some little specks of gold got through that you missed.

So they really recycled everything.

Yes.

They recycled the cyanide, the water, because water was brought from Silver Peak up to the Cord Mill.

Yes. Right. Everything they possibly could, they reused. Like I say, that slag would be rerun and rerun and rerun, so very little got past them. It was a very, very efficient method of milling. Today's milling, of course, is more advanced. Today we make a better recovery than they did, and it doesn't cost so much in electricity and power. But it's just because of improved technology. The very basic principle is pretty close to the same.

That basic principle of the cyanide pulling out the gold.

Right.

We saw various remains of each part of this process that you've just described, and the Cord Mill will not be disturbed by the mining by Mineral Ridge Resources, right?

No. Right.

But the process of getting the gold out of the Mary Mine and the Drinkwater is going to be similar. Could you describe a little bit about that process? It's going to be the heap-leach process?

Right. Well, the mining is going to be different and the milling. The old-timers, every bit of what they mined was all underground, except on the shovel level—

thus the name. But there they had an old-time . . . well, it's a Fordson tractor with a kit on it to convert it to a little steam shovel. (They've got one at the museum in Tonopah.) That was really moving muck in those days.

And, in fact, you said you've been in the Mary Mine underground, and there is how much under there?

It's about fifty-six miles of underground workings. There's many different levels. What they call the outcrop level is right up on top of the mountain, and then the very deepest level is the Number Four level in the 366 winze, which is about four hundred feet below the portal. If you're looking at the portal, that's about four hundred feet vertically below you, so they were all through it. But everything they did was underground. Zephyr, and then followed by Homestead, came in to take the highest grade parts of the stopes. They mined open pit—that area that's been mined now, which we drove through.

Which is the big Drinkwater pit?

Yes. There was very, very little exploration. Sunshine did quite a bit of exploration. They felt that it just wasn't economical at that time. And so Zephyr and Homestead used their data, as the price had come up quite a bit, and decided to make a go of it. And then these guys came in and expanded on what Sunshine had done and tried to look at the whole area very precisely. To make sure that, instead of just this one little spot and a number of small pits, they involved an engineer to take in all these ore bodies that they found, including what's left of the Drinkwater pit, and to determine just what the whole mine was worth as an open pit.

Back to the milling [for Mineral Ridge Resources Inc.]—it'll be shipped up to the

Oromonte where the terrain and everything is suitable for a heap leach. And the ore, instead of using the old-timers' milling method, it'll all be heap leached. The engineering and everything has been done to show that that's the way to go in this day and age.

And so there'll still be some crushing done to begin with?

Yes, it'll all be crushed down to a certain size and then "englobinated" with cement so that the solution will, instead of channeling down just naturally and only running down through certain spots, it'll go down through the entire leach evenly. The solution is squirted out of a sprinkler. You probably drove by enough of them to see the solution squirting up into the air and onto the leach. There's two reasons for that: A-number one is to put even solution over the entire heap in even amounts instead of squirting it all down in one spot; and the other is to oxygenate the solution just like they did in the mill in the early days with agitators and the ball mill and everything. Now they do it by spraying it in the air, and then it goes down through the pile.

So that the cyanide solution picks up oxygen as it's sprayed over the leach pile?

Right. Right. Which makes it more aggressive to go after the gold as it's working its way down through the pile. And then at the bottom of the pile, there's a whole system or network of perforated pipes that are going to pick up the solution after it's worked its way through the pile. From there it goes through (I'd like to say Merrill-Crowe, but I'm not sure what kind of system they're going to use) the recovery system, which is going to be pretty much the same thing as the old-timers did, only, of course, with filter presses and everything. They'll look just like the ones the old-timers were

using, but they're smaller and more efficient, don't leak, and have all the things that we've got today, like alloyed plastics and things that the old-timers didn't have to work with.

So that cyanide process made a big difference for this area, because that was the best way to get the most return out of the ore?

Right. Using amalgamation and gravity, the old-timers were getting maybe a 50 percent recovery. So the famous John Blair, that the town of Blair was named for, lost his shirt the whole time he was out here, because they couldn't get any recovery. It was good ore and lots of it, but they just couldn't get the gold out of it. So it wasn't until the cyanide process came out right around the turn of the century that, all of a sudden, made this a doable concern.

And especially for this area. Was that the main innovation in this area that made a difference?

Yes.

That and you talked about the flotation circuit. That was important. Now the new heap-leach type of process is not exclusive to this area?

No. It's just another step in the evolution of milling. See, to this day Sunshine's mill was a CCD [counter current decantation] cyanide mill. What they used was sand leach, but it was still a cyanide mill. So in some ores, milling is the way to go; in some ores, heap leach is the way to go. And what these metallurgists have shown is that in this particular situation, for this particular type of ore, they feel heap leach is the most efficient way to go. So I'm not saying heap leach was the way to go with all of them. There's probably ore where amalgamation

is still the best, but this particular mine at this particular time—that's the way to go.

Now, a lot of your expertise is not in the milling so much as in the mining process, correct? And so you've seen both underground and open-pit mining. And this is an area right now where it's changing from underground to open pit?

Yes, right, and that probably will change back again as things evolve. See, it doesn't take too awful long to work out an open-pit mine, and so the next step is to see what's down below that. Did the old-timers mine it all out or not? According to the old-timers that are still around, it was the war board that shut every non-strategic gold mine in the United States.

During World War II.

Right. And a lot of them have never recovered because of that. So the old-timers say that the last day the mine operated, they had all the ore they needed to keep the mill running, and they felt it was a real rosy looking future. So at some point in time, after the pit's going and the heap leach is working out, and they're getting some sort of a return on their money, I'm sure that the next step in the grand scheme of things would be to look at the underground and see what potential's left and if the reserves are there to make it doable at this time or not. Only time will tell.

Do you have a favorite? Would you rather be working underground as opposed to open pit?

No question. Underground.

Why is that?

Because it's very, very highly skilled labor. Miners are just a breed all their own.

Open pit is just glorified construction, dirt-moving, where a miner has to know what he's doing all the time. You're king of your own stope. You mine it, and nobody tells you how you're going to do it. You just better do it right, or they'll get somebody in there that can. And there's just no comparison between the two.

It's more challenging, it sounds like, underground.

Oh, definitely, definitely.

Because I would think that some people who haven't done that would say, "Mm, rather not be down underneath the ground, not seeing daylight." But that's not where the challenge lies?

That's right. There's just no comparison. I . . . it's hard to describe, but miners all have a great pride in their work, and I just enjoy being a part of all that.

Yes. So you've been doing this since . . . well, when you were thirteen, so thirty years? What kind of changes have you seen in that thirty years?

I've gone out of my way to work at smaller mines, rail and conventional-type mining, so there's been a lot of changes as far as rubber-tired equipment and jumbos instead of jack-legs and . . .

What is that—jumbos and jack-legs?

A jack-leg is one drill that one guy operates, and a jumbo is four drills that one guy operates. From what I've seen in recent years, the whole idea of underground in the past has been to get the very highest grade ore and move the least amount of waste possible, where today they're bringing more [of] the open-pit mentality into it—break lots of tons and don't really worry about

what the head grade is, just break lots of it. And I hate to see that, because I like to see where you just take the ore. God put ways there to hold up the mountain, so leave it right where it's at. But anyway, everything changes, and you've got to change with the times or end up like the whalers! [laughter]

Yes. Out of business forever. Anything else that's been significant . . . changes?

Bureaucracy. One thing I just loved about the mining profession as a kid was the whole idea that you could go out into the mountains and just make a fortune, that the possibility was there, where today you're just strangled to death by every type of a bureaucrat imaginable. Most of them serve no real use for the public or the animals they're supposed to be protecting. They're just absorbing most of the budget of the whole company. You know, asinine little things like that.

Lots of red tape, an incredible amount of rules just to get started up there at the Mary and the Drinkwater.

Yes. My little company, when I gave up on it, the reason I gave it up was . . . Well, I was still kind of stumbling along, but I had a full-time job doing paperwork. If I was doing paperwork, I couldn't be mining, but if I didn't do the paperwork, I'd go to jail. So I couldn't do both. There aren't enough hours in a day.

And you couldn't do what you liked the most, being out mining?

Right. And there isn't enough profit in it to hire somebody to play around and do paperwork all day, so it's a real Catch 22.

So the individual entrepreneur has a harder time making it now, just like in farming, where it's hard to run a small

farm profitably. It's more cost-efficient to work for a larger operation?

That's right. The bigger companies can afford to have a land man that just pampers all the bureaucrats and keeps them happy. And they're working a whole bunch of different projects, so it pays off compared to the small guy who's working one mine.

The paperwork is overwhelming [for the small operation].

Right. And he doesn't have the money to fight the bureaucrats. Like a bigger company can scare them away. They [bureaucrats] want to impress their boss, so it's a lot easier to tear up a little guy that can't afford to fight back. So you see, a lot of the ma-and-pa-type mines are falling by the wayside. Mina, when I first was working out in this area, was a booming little town. The railroad was in there. There were bars, cafes, stores—everything that makes a town work, and just rip-roaring all the time. A bum couldn't hitchhike through without getting captured to go to work at some mine someplace. And now the poor place is all but a ghost town.

There's not much motion around there these days.

No. Well, the EPA has shut down all those mills, because their tailings ponds, even though they've been there a hundred [years], all of a sudden they have to bring them up to modern code, right now, tomorrow. And, of course, the operators just didn't have the money to do all that, and so all the mills are shut down, and the rail was discontinued. The backbone of the town was the custom milling business, and so that was the end of the hump for Mina. But we'll see what the future has.

In terms of Silver Peak, you've talked about a lot of changes in mining, a lot of innovations. Have you seen anything particular in Silver Peak that you haven't seen anywhere else? Or is it pretty typical of the changes that are happening in mining all over?

I'd say it's pretty typical. If somebody wanted to do a study of the boom-and-bust economy of a little mining town, the town is solely dependent on mining. Most other towns have ranching or trucking or tourism to kind of support them in the down times, where Silver Peak is strictly mining so that you can really see the effect here.

And the amazing thing is, it's still going through this boom and bust after all these years, because I remember reading . . . in 1926 there were ten people in town, and then in the 1930s there were over a thousand, for example. Now you are still in the boom-and-bust cycle?

Right, because it's solely dependent on mining. The laws change, or the metal prices change, so all of a sudden things are booming. And then maybe Congress will wake up tomorrow and decide to shut down the gold business again; then down she goes. You just never know.

Is Silver Peak different to you in any way than any of the other places that you've worked? Any more special than any of the other places you've worked?

It's special because I've been here now longer than most, but each mining town, there's something real special about it. The people here are real nice and all seem to work together toward things. They have their little squabbles about who has the first float in the Fourth of July parade, but as luck would have it, everything works itself out. So there's a lot of camaraderie here that you

don't see in other towns or maybe more so here than other towns.

Because you're very isolated. You're an hour away from anything, which is Tonopah, correct?

Yes, which isn't much to start with. [laughter]

And that's not a big center, really. I mean there's not any huge K-Mart, twenty-four-hours-a-day chain stores, or anything like that there.

Right.

There's a grocery store, and there's gas stations and so on.

Yes, that's one thing that's interesting about the area. We're within a half a mile, or maybe it was three miles, I forget which, of being exactly halfway between Vegas and Reno. My wife's family is mainly around Fallon, and so we naturally go to Reno shopping and stuff, where a lot of people here . . . It's surprising how many people are very, very familiar with Vegas and have never even been to Reno. And here we are the opposite: we don't know Vegas that well . . . might as well be going to Peru.

And, in fact, you said you go to the doctor in Fallon for your family, correct?

Yes.

The closest doctor here is Tonopah?

Tonopah, but usually there's such a waiting line at the clinic there, you wait four or five hours to get in—that's with an appointment. And so you might as well [go to Fallon]. You'd be on your way home before you even got in to the doctor in Tonopah. And not degrading the doctor, Dr.

Schwartz, who we've had the kids to on an emergency and different things. Everything I've heard, he's just a crackerjack of a doctor.

But he's the only one for quite an area around here?

Well, there's other doctors in the clinic. That's the only one I'm familiar with. But from all I've heard he's a very, very competent, good doctor. We sure don't have any complaints, but for us, we just go to Fallon. That's where we're used to going.

Seems like people that I've talked to who grew up here as a child or had lived here for a period of time, that they're particularly touched by Silver Peak in some way, particularly attached to it. And you say this is different for you only because you've been here longer, but you get that sense about every mining town that you've been part of. And what do you think that's about?

Well, it's a lot easier to get snarled up into the local politics and the fire department and things like that. In a bigger town, you're kind of insulated from all the local government and what the cop's kids are up to and that sort of thing. Where here, you're right in the thick of it, because you've got to pitch in to make it all work. So after it does work, then you feel a little better about yourself, that you could've layed at home and watched TV but got involved instead. So that helps.

It is a wonderland for kids out here. There's every kind of a horny toad and lizard known to man running through the hills, and the kids can identify every one of them. You don't need to worry about the kids wandering off and falling down an old shaft or something. They're far enough away from the mines that the kids can hike around all

they want without getting themselves into any real trouble.

So they have a lot of freedom here? The kind that kids in a large community may not have just because of safety issues.

Yes, yes. No gangs or weird stuff like that down here. And everybody kind of keeps an eye on each other's kids, so you don't have to worry about some weirdo moving up the street or something.

And if they're in trouble, you're going to hear about it, right? [laughter]

Oh, yes. You bet. And the school is a very good one. The kids . . . when they do the statewide tests of all the various schools, this little school ranks in the upper third of the state.

They get a lot of individual attention?

Right. And they have multiple classes per room, so the kids are listening to what their buddies in sixth grade are doing while they're in the fifth, and they get a sneak preview of what they're going to be up against.

And, in fact, they're starting to study these kinds of things about schools, about putting grades back together like the little country schools used to do. That's a good thing for kids to be helping each other and working together.

Because kids learn better from kids than they do from adults yelling at them. [laughter]



You said it took you ten years to learn underground mining. Can you tell me in a little bit more detail what kinds of things you had to learn and why it takes that length of time?

Yes. It's not just me. That's what it takes for everybody. [laughter] I'm a little more boneheaded.

First of all, underground is a trade where open pit is just construction, just basically laborers. Underground, you work your way up through the ranks. There are a bunch of different trades you can pick up. Some guys become a timber man or a tunnel stiff or a shaft hand. If you learn it all, you become what they call a contract miner, where you go out and you bid the work. You start out on the surface as a top-lander.

Could you tell me what each of those jobs are? As you say the name of it, could you tell me what kind of work you do?

OK. As a top-lander, if you just hired out, that's the guy that is just basically a laborer on the surface, that digs ditches, moves the timber from the timber pile over to the cage to lower it down underground. From there, you can become a hoistman (some mines call it an engineer) or a mechanic or a framer—the guy that actually cuts the timber into the sets. Of course, if you want to go underground, then after you have enough seniority, you can go down. You start in as either a nipper or a skip tender.

And what are those?

Nipper is the guy that's basically a laborer. He hauls the timber from the cage to the heading the guys are working in or moves powder around or breaks boulders on the grizzly or just all the grunt work that takes place. In the bigger mines they have a cager, which is basically an elevator operator, the guy that rings the bell codes up to the hoistmen and makes sure that everything is right on the cage so you don't have timber falling off. Or a skip tender (like at the Mohawk where we used a skip instead of a cage) is the guy who dumps the muck from the draw points into the skip, and

that's his job all day long—to just keep filling the skip every time it comes down and bring it up.

From there, hopefully, you would meet up with somebody that would like you as a miner's helper or a nipper in the heading, because the miners always work in teams of two. They're paid some kind of a minimum wage and then everything else is contract. You're paid so much a foot or, if you're in the stopes, so much a cube as incentive pay. Mining's different than any other industry. Any other job, you hear people saying how much time they were able to hide out from the boss, where in mining you hear everybody bragging about how much footage they got, because if you goof off, you're not only beating yourself out of money but your partner besides and the shift following you. So you try to get just as much as you possibly can done in the shift.

From a helper, then you start learning how to drill a round and how to load it, how to timber—everything that's involved with that. And once you think you have that pretty well figured out, well then you bid into the raises or sinking a shaft. You have to move around from mine to mine to learn all the different situations, and that's why the guys are called tramp miners, because they're constantly on the move, because there may be a pump de-watering in a tunnel or weird ground at another mine that they want to learn about, or it pays a little better. And so the miners are just constantly on the move. Of course, today mines don't last very long. A few years back when there were mines everywhere, a guy was just constantly on the tramp. Or ten-day hand they called them—get in, get a paycheck, enough to get you down the road to the job you're actually going to.

So it takes about ten years to learn, because there is just so much that's different. The Comstock, you have running ground. It's about like trying to drive drift through muddy waters or marbles. And then

here we've got real competent ground. Each mine has its own type of mining and type of timbering, and so in order to learn all this different stuff, it takes time and a lot of miles.

Were those the steps that you went through, each one of those jobs that you described?

Right.

And you said that by the time you learned so much, you hoped that there was a miner who wants to take you on as a helper. Who was that person for you? Do you remember the first one that you started with?

Oh, there was a bunch of them. The first one (we really hit it off) was Steve Cate from Mina. Once in a while you click with somebody to where, every mine we hit, we usually pegged the board. They always keep a board showing who's making the best gypo, and we were usually right at the top. Just something where you know what the other guy's thinking, and he knows what you're thinking, so you don't have to stand around and compare notes: you just get the job done. And he and I tramped around together for, gee, quite a few years. He was one of the best hands I ever worked with.

Yes, and that's where you learned a lot, was with him?

Yes, yes, and other places. [laughter] I worked with all different characters. I was real lucky. I hooked in with . . . They're nicknamed the Pirate Crew. They're a pretty horrible gang, but they would always end up in jail or a bar fight or something. But they were famous throughout the West as the very best in the business. I think I was just lucky to get reined in with that bunch. Whenever we hit a mine, the reputation goes ahead of you, so we always had to keep

up our reputation. We always did very well, so.

And kept up your reputation after hours, too, did you? Had to do both? The two went together? [laughter]

Oh, well, yes. Let's see, there's K Bond and Drunken Duncan, June McKnight, Screaming Beaman, Three-Finger Gunner, Johnny Nickelbee, and Suitcase Simpson and a few more guys that ran around in that clique. Most of them are retiring or stoped-out now.

What does "stoped-out" mean?

Too lunged-up to work anymore.

They have trouble with their lungs?

Right. Right. The con. Yes, silicosis.

And I wanted to ask you a little bit more, because you said you first came here in 1976—as part of the Pirate Crew?

Well, no, I was working with Steve Cate. That's when I first started, with the second mine where he and I worked together. We worked up at the Ray Rickets Mine in Gabbs, a tungsten mine. And then he quit, and I had a couple of real lousy partners, so I came down here to see what in the heck he's up to. So he and I and Johnny Nickelbee were working together here at the Mohawk. At the time, it was owned by an outfit called Spring Creek Mines, which was owned by Mark Gavard and Jack Zane. Jack Zane has been in this area forever and just a heck of a nice guy. Mark, he was all right. I just didn't know him that well. He was kind of the promoter of the outfit, where Jack was on the scene. He was an owner, but he was also keeping an eye on the mechanics. He was a heck of an electrician, so he was making sure the electrical was all right. They had a mine for

him, and I guess he was kind of over the foreman or superintendent. I can't say enough about Jack. I knew him long before the Mohawk, and I haven't seen him in a number of years, but just great, great people. He has some sons that are the same age as I am or thereabouts, so we hit it off pretty well.

There was one other partner, a Ray Christianson, that was out at the Coeur d'Alene, and he was the mine superintendent. He was kind of a funny little guy. He was a little, short guy, and he kind of had the Napoleon complex, and we just kind of left him alone. [laughter] He's off in his own little world.

Describe the Mohawk silver mine when you got here. You said there was a great bunkhouse, and if you could just give me a lot more detail, kind of make a picture for someone who didn't see it.

The one thing that I liked about the Mohawk, it was the last of the camp jobs. That was about the time that mines were really turning to trailer houses instead of the old traditional bunkhouse and cook shack. So they had actually three bunkhouses up there—one was day shift, one was swing, and one was graveyard, and then this humongous cook shack. They charged four or five dollars a day for groceries and lodging.

One thing about Jack and Mark, they look out for the miners, so the bunkhouses were real well insulated. They had plenty of water, which had to be hauled from Silver Peak for showers and that sort of thing. They had this gal out of Mina, Bobbie Boyd, who was married to an old cowboy, Les Boyd. I can tell you stories on that character all day long. But anyway, she was the cook. And the meals that they put on, you could have made three meals out of any one. At dinnertime there might be pork chops, steak; and then some kind of noodles for the

old-timers that didn't have any teeth; and then salad and potato salad, noodle salad. I mean, the table just went on and on and on. They really treated the guys right. And that little Ray Christianson would chew Bobbie out in the morning, because she's feeding thirty guys and [would] have one plate full of pancakes left over and [was] feeding them to the chipmunks, and he'd be all upset about, "Oh, wasting money." [laughter] But Jack and Mark weren't like that at all. If they got upset, it'd be because maybe she wasn't feeding everybody enough.

Food's pretty important for this kind of work, because you're burning calories?

Yes, you bet. High protein. Just go, go, go. Just burn all day long.

And you're needing liquid, too. What did you get to drink in terms of water and coffee, whatever?

That was what they call a dry camp. There were no women and no alcohol allowed up there, and you worked ten days on and four days off. They made a point of always having plenty of drinking water and then what they called "gray water" or just crummy old water that was used for showers and laundry or that sort of thing. It wasn't potable water.

But all of that was hauled there?

Hauled in, yes.

How far is the Mohawk from Silver Peak itself?

I believe it was about twenty-seven miles.

And it's which direction?

You go out of town toward the dump, across the valley, up into the mountains behind the Sixteen-to-One. It's on the same

Just kind of south and east of here? Is that right?

South, but if anything, it would be a little west. There used to be this water-truck driver. Parsons did all the hauling, and that road is just horrible into the mine. They'd haul the ore from the mine down here to Silver Peak—there's still a little muck pile behind Parsons's yard—and then they'd crush it and reload it on to highway trucks, haul it into Mina, and put it on the railroad. The Mohawk sat at about, I believe it was 8500 feet. It's way the heck up in the mountains.

This cook shack, it was just monstrous. This huge dining room, huge kitchen. Well, first you went through the front door. (I guess I'll describe the whole thing.) And that's what they call the lamp room. That's where you plug in all your mine lights. Our slickers and all our underground gear is there. Then you went through another door, and there was a hallway with apartments on both sides for the big shots or investors to stay in, so they were pretty swanky. And then you went into this humongous dining room. Beyond the dining room was the kitchen and then a big commissary where they stored all the groceries. Behind that were two more apartments. One was where Jack stayed. The other was for Ray Christianson. Of course, I was never in those, but I assume they were pretty nice. And then the bunkhouses themselves were the three buildings side by side. They had partitions in them and two bunks to a little partition, so each guy and his partner would stay in there. You see, you'd better get along with your partner. You work with him all day, and then you're sleeping about four feet away from each other all night.

And you probably ate your meals together at the cook house, too.

Right. Right. So you better get along. Oh, I started to tell you about old Spud. Anyway, the mines are at eighty-five hundred feet [elevation], and here comes the snow. It blew in there about four-feet deep, and snowflakes the size of silver dollars coming down. Bobbie, the cook, was having a heart attack, because she figured that they were going to run out of groceries. We're snowed in for the winter, and she's running around doing this inventory to figure out how long she's going to make the supplies last. A few guys made attempts to get out of there. You'd drive along the ridge top and then straight down into the canyon. You could kind of make it out onto the ridge and look into that canyon. No way to try it.

So anyway, a day or two went by and the clouds parted. After a snowstorm you know how it is—the sky is crystal clear, and there's flakes of ice coming down, and you could hear a pin drop for miles. Well, we heard this low rumbling noise, and I couldn't figure out what in the heck was going on. It kept getting louder and louder, and here comes Spud driving Elton's water truck, and the snow was so deep he was pushing snow. This is a big Kenworth truck pushing snow with the radiator. We had figured it'd take a dog team to get out of there, so we asked Spud, "How in the hell did you get up here?"

And he said, "I couldn't find a place to turn around." [laughter]

[laughter] So there came the water.

Yes, the road was open.

Did he bring groceries with him, too?

No. Once he blazed a trail in there, then everything was OK, but we had some times up there.

Another time there was a big earthquake. It was so severe that it knocked all the canned goods off the shelves in the pantry. Everybody on the surface felt it. It knocked the cable out of the shiv wheel on the headframe. I guess it shook things pretty well, but we were working underground: never felt a thing. Of course, the panic was on. They thought the whole mine had caved in and everybody was dead, so they called us out. We figured, "Oh, another fire drill," and just kind of wandered out. Here everybody's running around in this big panic, and we never felt a thing underground.

Didn't even know it. Isn't that something?

It's weird. [laughter] I don't know how it could have happened. Maybe we were so used to staggering around that we didn't notice.

[laughter] Is the Mohawk where they had the cave-in?

Yes, yes. There were three guys buried up there—Sam Sickles, Chief Deloren, and Jimmy Robelson. It was a terrible, terrible deal. They had a huge stope up there, and it was nearly ninety feet from the hanging wall to the foot wall—big, square-set stope. There was a big misconception, which this might be a good time to get cleared up. The company . . . I don't know the name of the company. It was about 1964 that it was operating. They had an engineer named Camozzi in there that decided to pull a foot wall. See, in the Mohawk you have high-grade stringers of very, very high-grade silver—almost jewelry rock, but these little narrow stringers that go out into the foot wall, and the foot wall is very blocky. The hanging wall was good, but the foot wall would run away from you sometimes. So this engineer decided to start pulling the foot wall, which . . . well, that took all the integrity of the square sets out. Everybody

quit on that stope, because the foot wall started to slip, and that pulled the square sets into a diamond shape. Then they have no strength at all, and so everybody quit—walked away from it. In those days everybody pretty much went to Grants, New Mexico, to the uranium mines.

The three guys working in there had worked in the stope. This engineer asked, "Well since the stope is condemned, could you guys . . ." asked these two partners if they would stay over and pull all the machines—the drills, tuggers—all the equipment out of that stope. Then they were going to go ahead and condemn it. This happened on swing shift. They pulled a nipper off that was working that regular shift, and they were in there pulling the equipment when she turned loose, and that was on the 300 level. (I forget the number of the stope.) And the whole thing came at once, all the way to the surface. There's chunks of trees and sagebrush and stuff down on the 300 level. That's 300 feet—a crater the size of a football field on the surface, so it all just let loose at once. It came so hard, they had steel air doors (air doors are to control the ventilation in the mine) . . . It blew them right out of the rib on the 300 level.

They put out an emergency call. The best miners from all over the western United States showed up to try (Chick Selois was among them) . . . hoping these guys . . . When they saw the mess, they knew there was no way the guys could be alive, but the families were up in arms. So these guys with this muck piling . . . You know, for probably a year afterwards it will be settling and moving and grinding. One crew started out for the incline shaft, spiling a drift—that's where you drive timber ahead of you through the muck pile and then catch it up with sets. And then another crew started from the 300 level in the main shaft and drifted toward each other trying to recover their bodies. Of course, there was no hope,

and they never did recover their bodies. They're still buried there. They put up a plaque in honor of the guys, and some no-good rat stole it.

The big misconception that the company and the mine inspectors bought is the story that it was an act of God—that they had been doing a lot of Cat work on the surface to do drilling, and it had rained real hard, and the water soaked into the drill holes and made the whole thing cave in. Everybody who was involved knew exactly what it was—that you couldn't relieve that foot wall or the whole place runs away with itself. And, you know, to this day people think that it was an act of God, where it was actually a big error on the management part. I'd kind of like to see credit where credit's due, because the guys killed were damn good miners, highly thought of in the industry. I don't like people thinking that they were the ones that screwed up. [Because of a cave-in at the next mine where he worked, the engineer earned the nickname "Cave-'em-in" Camozzi, according to Viljoen.]

And one story shows when your time's up, it's up. [laughter] As that stope was taking weight, of course, cracks were opening up and everything else. And this one miner told this nipper—his job was to slush [operate a slusher], keep pulling muck fast and furious as he went all around his work area and put wedges up into these cracks. This nipper kept coming by: he was tramping and kind of working with him, and the miner told him, "I'm sticking around until those wedges start falling out, and then I'm out of here." And sure enough, the same day of the cave-in, those wedges started dropping out of the back. So he rang for the cage, went up, and got his paycheck, jumped in his car and headed for Grants, New Mexico. He was killed in a car wreck at the exact same time that stope flopped. So, he would have saved some gas money just by staying where he was.

Amazing. That's an amazing story.

Weird.

Now, you weren't here when that happened, however . . .

No, no. But I know the younger half brother of one of the miners. George Holcomb's older stepbrother was killed in the cave, and George and I are pretty good friends. And then Steve Cate knew those guys who were killed. They were real good friends of Steve's dad. They worked together all over the country, so I heard a lot about it from Steve's dad.

So you got almost firsthand information from people who knew the men that were killed about what the conditions were in the mine when all that happened. Plus, then when you went to the Mohawk to work you told about what it felt like to go work where they had been killed.

Yes, I had heard all these stories, and then we worked in the stope right next to where this had happened. First of all, going back and seeing this drift that the guys had spiled through the muck pile . . . It had been all barricaded off. It was kind of a tomb, and then the company decided, "Well there's some more [ore] in there. We'll just . . ." They kept moving the barricade ahead a little bit. Anyway, we ended up in the stope right next to where this had taken place, pulling pillars that had been mined out. The last thing you do is pull the pillars and leave, let it cave, or backfill it. So we were in there pulling pillars, and it was kind of eerie, because these guys' coats and water jugs and things were still hanging where they had left them.

That was a pretty wild stope. I had always heard from the old-timers that the ground kind of works with the tides. At noon and midnight the ground, if it's going to

move, it really starts moving. I always thought, "Yeah, yeah," because miners are just as superstitious as they come. But sure enough, in that one, we were told . . . Well, the last thing Mark or Jack wanted to do is hurt somebody, but they did need that ore. Steve and I, they knew we weren't the type to just go in there and take a nap, so they said, "If you start feeling a little weird or things don't seem right, just sit down and wait a while and have a cigarette and watch it."

We worked swing shift, because they figured if it was going to flop, they didn't want to endanger anybody. Day shift is when most of the people are in the mine. Swing was just a few miners, and then graveyard was timber repair and muck haulage, and swing was mainly muck haul. So sure enough, about eleven o'clock there was a great huge crack through the middle of the back, all the way up, and about eleven o'clock it started working, and dust would trickle out of it. By midnight, slabs would be dropping off the back. We had bulkheads built all over to kind of protect us, so about eleven we'd usually just hide out until the end of the shift, and by midnight you could hear it grinding and everything else, and then it would start settling down again. As far as I know, that stope is still standing. But, boy, we figured every night was the last.

I ought to tell one on that crazy Steve. We went to lunch one day, and them top-landers had sent down a whole bunch . . . In those days we used dynamite. They hadn't come out with prill or anything, or if they had, we hadn't heard about it. And so the top-landers had shipped down boxes and boxes of powder to be taken by the nipper on our level back to the powder magazine. You don't eat lunch at any normal time when you shoot. You go out and have your lunch while the stope smokes out and then go back to work. So we went out to the station. Here's the skip tender just throwing everything onto the station—just boxes of

powder stacked up in every direction. And, of course, we're the world's greatest miners, not lowly nippers, so we're not going to put it away or anything. So what we did is, we stacked up a bunch of boxes of powder for a table, and then we stacked up two or three of them with one leaning against the rib for lounge chairs, and we sat there eating our lunch. Finally, we figured that stope's smoked out good enough, and Steve was in the cage just going back and forth. We were right at the station all the time. You don't really pay any attention, and we decide to go back to work, and Steve's putting out his cigarette on the top of the powder box. Right then the mine inspector gets out of the skip, and here's Steve putting the cigarette out on top of this box of powder, and everything there is as illegal as could be. I thought, "Oh, boy, this is it. We're going to Leavenworth." The mine inspector, Mack Alexander, is just a prince of a guy. He looked at Steve, and if looks could kill. He said, "Just what would you do if all that powder went off right now?"

Steve said, "I guess I'd have to ring to the hoistman to send down some more." [laughter]

He threw up his arms. "I walked into it. I walked into it," and down the drift he went. [laughter] But, normally, underground they had a system of rapping on the pipes to let you know when the mine inspector or the boss is coming, and for some reason we didn't hear the signals.



We were talking about the Mohawk Mine . . . The deaths of those miners was an important event in Silver Peak, because not many serious accidents had happened around here.

Right.

You kind of shuddered when you talked about working in the stope right next and seeing their jackets.

That gives you an eerie feeling. These are guys that I'd heard about for years, most of my life. To hear stories is one thing and to meet family members. Everybody was so shook up about what a charade the company had pulled in degrading these guys' names and all the guys that had worked in that stope. And actually getting the mine inspectors to buy something like that Everybody felt there had to be some bribery or something involved. (It was MESA, Mine Examiners Safety Administration. But now it's MSHA, Mine Safety and Health Administration. That's the federal agency that looks over mining.) Because the federal inspectors in those days were all good mining men: they knew the ropes; they knew what they were doing; they had to work so many years in mining, so it would have been pretty hard to fool them. Where today, MSHA, they have very few of the real miners left. They're pretty much college boys that are up on safety and don't have much in the way of practical experience. Where the state, to this day, is probably one of the best institutions as far as mine inspectors go. They have to have a certain amount of on-the-job experience. I'm sure there are a few deadbeats, but the ones I've been involved with are real good guys. They're, you know, ten times the inspectors that MSHA has.

What we're talking about here, in terms of your feelings about working in there, is something that you live with all the time when you're underground, which is the chance, the risk of the mining. It's risky.

But then, on the other end of the stick, one thing that's so nice about mining is your stope or your raise or your heading is your palace. You do it your way. Nobody really fools with you. The shifter usually comes around twice during the shift to see if you need supplies. If you can handle a job, that's fine and dandy: you do it your way. If not,

they just tramp you and hire somebody that can do it. There's no foolishness or second tries. If you have any faith in the way you do things, it isn't scary or boogie monsters or anything like that.

OK. And that freedom to run the show your own way when you're underground is also part of what makes you feel safe, because you know what you're doing.

Right. But then something like the big cave-in slaps you back into reality once in a while. You've heard all these stories time and again, and then, there you are, working where it happened. And to prove it even more are their coats, their water jugs, their lunch pails . . . you know, just as if they were still working in there.

And these were some of the best miners, so if it could happen to them . . .

Yes, the two miners, those two guys were some of the best. The nipper, he probably would have grown up to be one of the best, but he was just a kid breaking in.

When you were working there, did you leave the jackets?

Oh, yes, yes. Miners are very, very superstitious. You don't touch anything.

You don't disturb anything.

You bet. Oh, yes. That's hallowed ground over there. We went in, and we admired the guys' timberwork from the rescue crews. We knew a lot of the guys that had been on the rescue crew, and we went in and looked at the conditions that they were working in but not to steal anything or touch anything.

It's a place to show respect for people who have passed away.

Yes, you bet, because in the mines they've got what they call Tommyknockers, which were the spirits of everybody that's been killed, so you don't want to make them mad. [laughter]

OK. [laughter] One of the things that I also want to go back and talk about the Mohawk But I apologize. That seems like an abrupt change to me, because this is an emotional subject about these fellows.

Yes, all miners feel that way.

Is there anything more that we need to say? I don't want to change too abruptly on that subject.

One thing to remember with miners . . . where you work, live, eat with your partner, all tramps are very, very tight-knit to this day. The wives all know each other. The kids all know each other. When somebody's hurt or killed or got cancer or something, everybody's constantly on the phone to each other. Everybody, no matter how spread out you are, everybody knows what each other is up to. So when one of the gang, something happens, everybody feels it. So that's, I guess, why it would be emotional to others besides the family.

To everyone, because the community is not defined so much by the town that you're in, as that you're all in the same occupation.

The trade. Right. And you depend on your partner. If he makes a mistake, you usually don't get torn up too badly: either you get skinned up, or you get mangled. [laughter] So you have all the faith in the world in all your buddies.

Right. Yes. And so that makes it even harder when there is a loss like that. Because when you went back there, it was over ten years after that had happened.

Right, right. And these guys were in the next generation. I worked with their sons. So other than just hearing the stories, I didn't know anybody other than George that was directly involved.

Another thing about the Mohawk Mine that you had talked about is that you and your partner had the impression that what was going on there was more of a stock scam.

Well, now with Mark Gavard and Jack Zane, it was anything but a stock scam. That was when the price of silver roared up to forty bucks: that's when we were there. That was kind of the tail end, when the price went way up. And then, see, that ore is kind of complex. They used to mill it at Vollmar's Mill, and when we came into the picture, it had to be shipped to the smelter. And later on, an outfit in Gardnerville called Veda Grande was milling the ore for us. They had a flotation mill over there, so they were shipping the ore all the way to Gardnerville to have it milled. And then, who knows why or what, but Veda Grande decided to buy Jack and Mark out. Their big shots came up, and they were all looking around. They were going to spend a million bucks fixing up the bunkhouse and even planned a lawn. They were going to do this and do that, hire all these people, but they never once mentioned upgrading any of the equipment underground or doing any development work. Everything they talked about spending any money on was for show—the kind of stuff the stockholders would see. And so we thought, “Well, this sounds like a pretty good time to cash our checks while we got the chance.” I had been on to a job of just mucking out from under the stopes, and Steve went on the tramp. He had heard about a few jobs over on Candelaria, the Potosi Mine over there. So he thought he'd put the rustle on them for the both of us, and then I would give him the gas stake. That's what happened, and, finally, he came back,

and we'd landed some work, and away we both went.

And it turned out not to be a stock scam, is that right?

Oh, I'm sure it was, but the mine operated for quite some time after. But those showed all the earmarks of a big swindle, which usually doesn't last more than a few months, and everybody's paycheck bounces on and on, and the sheriff comes and locks everything up, including your clothes and tools. So we thought it would be a good idea to get out while the going was good.

You don't want to get caught in the middle of one of those, if your clothes and your tools are part of your business. That's how you stay in business.

Right, but they did operate. And then they got another guy killed, so the mine's got a reputation of a killer mine when, actually, it's very good ground. It's just that accidents have happened.

I just want to make a note that the reason that we went into talking about that is that the Mohawk Mine and these accidents are part of Silver Peak's history, even though they're not specifically part of the Mary Mine, which is the area you are looking at working right now. But another question I had was, there have been a number of mining companies coming and going in recent years, in the 1970s and 1980s, and I get confused about it. Can you tell me the succession?

Yes. Well, basically, when Steve and I were leaving here, Jim Gavin and Hefty Sanderson were leaping up and down, "Sunshine's coming to town! They're going to do this. They're going to do that." We thought, "Yes, yes. What's Sunshine going

to do around here?" And, by God, they did show up. They had the Sixteen-to-One, which is on the same vein system as the Mohawk and the Nivloc and the Sanger Mine, and they developed it. They built an 800-ton-a-day mill out here, and while they were operating they picked up other properties, which the Mary Mine happened to be part of their holdings. They had Weepah and a number of other properties around here.

Well, when the price of silver went to pot, they decided to lease the property (all their holdings) to an outfit called Zephyr Resources. Zephyr Resources was just a 100 percent promotion. They wanted the Mary for the high assays and to stir a dust—do a big stock promotion—peddle the stock and vanish into the night before the dust cleared. The way things worked out, it didn't work for them. They couldn't pump their stock up the way they wanted to, and their production costs were too high.

So they sold their lease to an outfit called Homestead Minerals, which was part of the Art Wilson Company from Moundhouse. They mined gypsum over there. Art's dad was a miner up on the Comstock, so Art, in his heart, always wanted to be in the gold business like dear old dad. Ace Wilson was his name, very highly respected guy. He was the only black guy in Silver City, so they had it tough growing up, but he was a very good miner. Anyhow, the company was badly, badly mismanaged. Art had always mined gypsum, so he didn't really have a grasp of how gold was mined. Through mismanagement, everything just kind of fell apart, and the company went into bankruptcy.

Of course, when that happened, all the leases went back to Sunshine. Sunshine took another look at things, and they decided the price of silver's not going to come up to where they wanted. So they decided to try to sell the mine and mill, and they dropped all their leases. And that's where Mineral Ridge Resources came into

the picture and picked up Mary Mine from whoever they were leasing it from. Now it's a completely separate entity. It doesn't have anything to do with Sunshine, Homestead, or anybody else. It's their enchilada.

OK. All right. And you've mentioned a couple of well-known names around Silver Peak—Jimmy Gavin and Hefty Sanderson. Jimmy Gavin owned the Shifting Sands Bar?

Right.

What was your acquaintance with him? He's passed away now.

Yes, he's been dead quite a while. He was a famous old miner. And one thing miners do is, if you're working in a district where there are some old-timers, you go around and say hello to them out of respect, and that's how we got acquainted with Jimmy. It was a typical miners' bar. There were probably about eight bar stools in the whole place, a little tiny place. Everything in it was bolted to the floor. There was nothing that could be thrown or broken or somebody thrown against and damaged in any way. [laughter]

He was so conned-up that he just sat at this big, huge oak table in one corner of the room. He had a hard time talking, because he'd literally lose his breath trying to talk. But he loved to talk about the Mary Mine, and at the time I didn't know where the heck the Mary was. We were always in kind of a hurry to either get to work or get home, so we talked to him but never in any detail. Steve did, because he knew where the Mary was. He talked more so than I did.

Jimmy was a prince of an old guy. Here came this skip tender that had spent more time in jail than out, and he had tattoos from head to foot, and he was wearing no shirt and a leather vest and all his tattoos. He was standing on the porch of the Shifting Sands

whistling at these little girls going over to the swimming pool. And, boy, Jimmy Gavin rooted around on the table where he had piles of magazines and newspapers and stuff and came out with this big hog-leg. The handle grips were all taped on with electrical tape. And Jimmy told him—first of all he wears clothes; he doesn't come into the bar naked; and he's going to show respect to the little girls around town; and get the hell out and don't come back. And as tough as that guy was, there was no argument. [laughter] Away he went.

And hog-leg, you're making the motion that it's a gun?

Yes, an old six-shooter of some sort. I didn't run over to look at what make it was or anything.

But he had some rules about what was OK at Silver Peak.

Oh, strict, you bet you. And then his wife tended bar. Her name was Marie, a little old lady, just older than time. Mainly, he did the talking, and she'd tend bar. Steve and I would go in: we'd be the only ones in the place. I guess they must have had some big refrigerators in the back room where they stored the beer, because in those days I drank Oly, and Steve drank Coors. And Steve said, "I'll take a Coors."

And I said, "I'll take an Oly."

"You just wait your turn young man. Just wait your turn," Marie said. She'd shuffle out from behind the bar, and we'd hear fumbling around and boxes moving and shuffling back and forth. And then pretty soon here she comes back with one Coors, set it down, take his money, make his change. "Now, what would you like?"

Well, shoot, by now he's already drank it, and he's ready for another one. [laughter] That was Marie.

One thing at a time.

Right, right. But they were real nice old folks.

There was another very famous guy living here in town that I didn't get very well acquainted with by the name of Harvey Humphrey, and he was a state senator. His dad and a guy by the name of Ed Sailor from my hometown, Ione, were the two guys that discovered Manhattan. Very, very famous family, the Humphreys.

And so these were people who were around in the 1970s when you were here at the Mohawk?

Right. We would see them, but like I say, we were in a big hurry to either get to work or get home. I was living in Ione, and that's a long drive from here, so you don't want to stand around and chat too long and get all beered up, and then it's the next day. Now you've got three days off. [laughter]

OK. You talked about the silicosis as being "conned-up." You've been in the mines quite a bit. Do you have any problems with it?

I don't think so. I can't breathe like I used to, but I think that's more age than anything else. But today, we water down our muck piles. We use wet-headed machines and water everything down, where in those guys' days, they didn't know how to fight the silica dust, and they had dry machines. They just hadn't invented ways to fight the dust. That silica is what they make glass of, and it breaks down into razor sharp little particles that just scar your lungs all up. The way your lungs fight off dust, natural dust that you breathe, is they produce mucus, and then you cough up the mucus. Well, when your lungs become all scarred up, your body thinks that it's dust, so it keeps pumping in more mucus. Finally, a guy just

drowns in it or dies of pneumonia. So, that's a rough way to go.

Do you see as much of it anymore as it used to be? Is it still a hazard?

Most guys are conned to a certain extent, but all the old-timers I know have died of it, to one degree or another. There's an old guy in Mina that just used to cough up blood all the time. It was just horrible. You'd go into the restroom, and the urinal would be coated with blood. John Cate, Steve's dad, died of it. They had him on oxygen, and he just slowly suffocated. Well, Les Ponquist, who used to live up in Ione, and that's the way he went. He always said, "Well, it's bronchitis." Anyway, that's why most of them are gone. It's a horrible way to die.

When you talked about the fellow who always said it was bronchitis, is there a certain amount of resistance to recognizing it?

Oh, sure. Miners are the very toughest of the tough. You aren't going to let a little particle of dust take you down. [laughter]



We're going to go back and pick up a couple of pieces of information that we've missed. First of all, Ben, you used the term competent ground. Could you tell me what that is?

Competent ground—good ground. Normally, that means ground that doesn't require a lot of timbering and stuff. It will stand on its own real well.

OK. So it doesn't need the support as you go through and take chunks of it out. Another term that you used was make the best "gypo." Tell me what that means.

The best contract money. [laughter] When the company will pay you by the foot or by the cube, and they're always trying to gyp you on the amount, on the measure-up, so it's referred to as gypo.

OK. And then we're going to clarify some things on Mohawk, but we may do that on paper. I want to go back to some of the sequence here. Can you tell me, in 1989 when you came back to Silver Peak for the second time, who did you work for then?

For Zephyr Resources under Rory Tibbals, who was the grandson of the Tibbals that you see on the old mine maps at the Mary. At the time I was working for Art Wilson Company, which became Homestead Minerals out of their Silver City office. And they were thinking about maybe a joint venture or something along those lines with Zephyr Resources. So Steve Russell, a very well respected geologist, was sent down to have a look at their ore reserves. They had me tag along to look at the pit from a practical or mining standpoint to see if things were being done the right way. And when I got here they were having a heck of a time with grade control. Their mill heads weren't anywhere near what they thought they ought to be, so Rory asked me if I would stay on, still working for Homestead, but under him to try and solve some of their grade control problems, which I did.

What would have been a title for the job that you were doing at that point?

Grade control officer or grade control person.

OK. And then from there you came to work for Mineral Ridge? Or did you start your own business then?

No. From there, eventually, Zephyr Resources' holdings here were bought out

by Homestead. Of course, I was already working for them, and I just stayed on. At that point, they made me pit foreman under John Tully, who was the pit superintendent for Zephyr. And, of course, he stayed on with Homestead. They didn't change the people around, just the management.

What is a pit foreman? What was your responsibility?

Everything that goes on in the pit. The superintendent pretty much stays in the office and makes sure that everything is going according to the mine model and the mine planning and that MSHA's happy and all of that.

My job was to stay up on the hill and make sure everything was going according to plan. It's like a chess game. Everything has to be done in the right order and the right timing, so the superintendent's job was to make sure that everything was balanced between the mine and the mill and everything was going according to schedule. And then, he was constantly in touch with me to let me know whether we were falling behind in one area or getting ahead of ourselves in another area, or if we were doing something that, of course, the state or federal inspectors would be against.

So you worked under the superintendent who oversaw the coordination between the mill and the mine.

Right. right. Later on, John was offered a lot higher paying position and more along the lines he enjoyed with an underground outfit down in Beatty, down at Bullfrog, where he's still working and still highly thought of. But he moved on, and they decided not to fill the superintendent's position, so I was stuck with the whole bailiwick.

So you were doing the pit foreman work and the superintendent's work, coordinating between the two?

Right.

How many men were working for you at that point?

I believe it was forty-eight, including the surveyors and everybody that was in and out of the pit—geologists and all of them, which those groups are kind of working for themselves, but someone's got to keep them pointed in the right direction.

Making sure everyone's coordinated. And should I be saying men and women at this point?

We did have two gals working up there—one on grade control, and another was a surveyor.

Because I know in the past when I've been talking to the people up through the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, and so on, women were not in the mines. They were not out in the field, correct?

Right. Underground in the 1930s . . . Miners are very superstitious, and women underground was a taboo, which has changed today.

Has it really?

Yes. I don't know how to say it in the right way.

The politically correct way? Say it in your way.

What's happening today is, they have to hire a certain number of women underground. In the early days, those jobs that didn't take a lot of physical strength were

given to the old-timers—feeling that the old-timers, even though they couldn't produce physically like they used to, they had those little pearls of information to pass on to the young guys so the information kept rolling. Where today, hiring women, they have to put them into hoistman jobs and things that (even though some of them are as strong as a bull on the average) requires less lifting and strenuous type work. So the older guys, say after age forty-eight, most of them can't buy a job. That's the reason there are so few of those jobs that are for somebody that doesn't have the strength they used to.

And so, is there some sense that women are taking away some of the jobs from the older men?

Sometimes there is. But now there are positions in the mines where women excel, say, in a hoistman position. That's something that's very high pressure, and everything has to be done just exactly right, or else you get somebody tore up or equipment broken. On the average, women are very patient, and they make sure that it's done just exactly right. They usually make darn good hoistmen. So I'm not saying they shouldn't be underground, I'm just saying this is a problem in the industry that somebody will figure out a solution to, and then everything will be fine.

You mean, in order to keep some of that expertise coming from the older men and yet still use women in areas where they're showing great skill?

Right. Right.

So at that point you were doing the pit foreman and the superintendent work. Tell me what happened from there with that offer.

We were on a tangent. [laughter]

That's all right. I wanted to pursue that a little more, because I knew that part about the superstition about women. So that's changing?

There's a lot of superstitions, but then a lot of them turn out to be true.

That wasn't one that turned out to be true, huh?

No. Well, finally Homestead Minerals went under, strictly because of corporate mismanagement. It wasn't because of the mine or the mill. The mill had the highest head grades in the state while it was operating and the lowest cyanide consumption and some of the highest recovery—as far as I know, the highest. We averaged about a 96 to 98 percent recovery in thirty-six hours, so that's something pretty incredible. The crew were just crackerjack hands.

But the hierarchy of the company felt that they ought to be making very important decisions regarding the pit from Carson City and Reno, and most of them would come out here maybe twice a year. They had no concept of what they were doing or asking us to do, which usually caused big disasters. And then, a lot of the profit was being pumped into outside schemes. They were financing some tire-shredding deal, where they were going to squeeze oil out of old tires for diesel and then use the shredded rubber to add to asphalt for highways. Probably a good idea, but the mine needed exploration drilling. We didn't need a tire shredding machine. They also pumped a whole bunch of money into some deal to make sewer sludge into fertilizer—all kinds of wild-eyed schemes. Maybe they were good ideas, but the money should have come back to the mine and not off into this pie-in-the-sky stuff. So anyway, the company fell apart.

One of the aces in the mining industry, just a prince among miners, happened to be

a project manager down here by the name of Earl Halderman. Had he lived a little bit longer, everybody would have been paid. But the strain was so great, and he was fighting the bankruptcy trustee who was trying to skim off all the money he could. The people at Homestead were skimming off what they could. And then he was also trying to keep the troops going, even though nobody had been paid in three weeks. Had he lived another week, all the employees would have been paid, but it just became too much, and he died of a heart attack. So everything folded up.

So the last three weeks on the job, you never received a paycheck for that?

Well, about the last month and a half for me, but the average was about three weeks for the hourly people. I was on salary, so I was different.

From there I started my contracting business back up, which I always do when times are tough. [laughter] If you can't find a job, you go make one.

So it wasn't the first time you had your own business? When was the first time that you had done that before, during the slow times?

Well, as a kid I was very fortunate, up in Ione, to get hooked up with a bunch of leasers. It's kind of a dead profession now, but those are guys who lease a property, and they'll mine it and split whatever profit, if there happens to be one. Of course, the company usually gets (it depends on how the lease is written) 10 percent. I've had split-check leases, you know, just all different ways of doing it. It's all on the up and up.

When the mercury days were still booming, I worked for some Canadian promoters. In fact, I went to work for an outfit which, I think, could have been the

wreckage of one of Fred Vollmar's companies just before it went under, because I know they had the Sodaville Mill, and I think that was his. But anyway, who cares? That's all way back when.

There may have been a connection there?

Right. Funny how you make a big circle. When that company went under, we were mining fluorspar for Grantsville. We were getting paid by the ton for it, and all of a sudden one day the fluorspar business went flat. All the promoters vanished into the night, and there we were. I didn't have any money. I was about eighteen, or maybe closer to seventeen. I moved into Lone just as the price of mercury was going down, so there were quite a few mercury mines still hanging on and waiting for the price to come back up. I ran into two guys, and one of their partners happens to be a guy named Bill Overholster, who lives here in town. Bill Overholster had been offered a real good job for the Smith Brothers down at the El Cap mercury mine in Death Valley. Of course, he had taken off for that, so they were short a hand. I was young and dumb, so I fell in where Bill took off, and we did pretty well. The price just kept going down, down, down, until we couldn't make any money.

But that was essentially your first time as an independent contractor, an independent leaser?

Right. When mercury died off, scheelite came up. So I went to work for some scheelite mines around Gabbs and did some leasing around Gabbs: it depended on which one looked like it would pay the best. It's just always been like that. In the recent years, there's no minerals worth mining other than gold because of the prices and imports for the last ten or fifteen years.

The prices of all the minerals have gone down because of imports from other countries?

Right, right. See, they can produce it overseas so cheap, like barite used to be a real good one. We got forty-two dollars a ton for it, and then they made a free-trade agreement with China. They were shipping Coca-Cola and transistor radios to China, and the Chinese would put barite onto the ships at fifty cents a ton for ballast coming back. So it was coming into Texas by the hundreds of thousands of tons. Nevada used to monopolize the world's barite supply, but that just absolutely wiped it out. There was no way we could compete with slave labor.

Amazing example of how the global economy is really having an impact on your business. It wasn't when you first started, not that much. Nationally it was, but not worldwide?

And so many things have changed. Like mercury is pretty much outlawed, as is so much that it was used for back when we were mining it. Plus, the reason that the price went up the way it did was in Spain, where the big mercury mines are, they basically used slave labor to mine it. Their prisoners that have long, long sentences are used to mine mercury, so Spain monopolizes the world mercury market. Well, these mines have been mined since the knights-of-the-round-table days, and so they've mined out under the ocean. And they had a big cave-in that wiped out a good part of the mines, until they got that area plugged off and the mines de-watered, so the price just went completely wild. And, of course, everybody jumped into it. But once they got that section of the mine plugged off and the mine de-watered, and then at the same time so much was outlawed because of polluting streams and one thing or another, the price just went right down to nothing.

So the last ten to fifteen years have been tough in terms of moving from one mineral to another?

Before, you had your choice. Fluorspar went right straight to the steel industry as a flux, so you could mine fluorspar. If you got tired of it or thought you could make more money in scheelite, which is tungsten and a hardener in steel, you went and mined scheelite or barite or merlinoite. But now, since the steel industry has pretty well shut down in this country, you don't have a demand for any of the minerals that are used with the alloys, so all of those are off. And then, of course, mercury is pretty much outlawed in most anything, so that business is gone. And barite is slave labor out of China, and so that one's done. And it gets right down the line to where gold's about it.

OK. And so you've been through all of those, and you've had your own business in between times, as one would go down and the other hadn't quite yet picked up. Most recently you had your own business after you came here in 1989. And when you had your business this time, how did you set it up, and what were you doing?

As contract mining, contract underground work to drive drift or re-timber—just basically anything that anyone wanted done underground.

Were you the sole person in your business, or did you hire employees?

I did hire some people. It fluctuated a lot from just me up to, I think, with the highest about thirteen guys working. We were doing two reclamation projects.

All right. And how long did you do that before you started here? What length of time?

About a year, according to the books.

Now this business is still open, but you're not actually doing any business?

Right. I keep all of the licenses and stuff current in case something else comes along, but it got to the point where most of the work I was doing was for Mineral Ridge. They said since I was starting to deal in some . . . not classified but touchy information, they thought for confidentiality agreements, why don't I just go to work for them. And I did.

And did that fit? Because you said that there were also problems in running your business in terms of regulations and so on.

Yes, with the bureaucrats.

Could you give me some detail on that? Like give me an example.

The worst possible example has to be the SIIS program, the state industrial insurance. Before it was called N.I.C., and it was the pride and glory of the whole union, the United States, because they had a huge surplus every year. Everything was taken care of quickly and efficiently. I don't know what happened that they decided to rename it SIIS and bring in a bunch of new blood, but the thing has just completely gone down the drain to where it's just a bureaucratic nightmare. Now I've heard this. I didn't have anybody get hurt working for me, but other guys in the same business as I am, I talked with them. They say when a guy gets hurt or something, it's just impossible to get any kind of treatment, or if the guy pays it out of his pocket, to get paid back. And the paper work we had to do, I had to have a full-time accountant—not just to take care of that, but that was probably . . . figure, two work days a week would be strictly to SIIS. They couldn't really comprehend the fact that

one week you might have ten employees, and the next week, one. One pay period, a guy's getting paid twenty bucks an hour to do underground work, and then the next pay period, he may be working on the surface and getting ten dollars an hour . . . well not ten, but fifteen or something. And that just takes reams of paperwork. By the time you got that turned in, the guy's making twenty again, and it just turns into a bureaucratic nightmare.

Because it's set up more for the kind of business where you hire someone on, and they make a certain wage for a year, and they get a raise . . .

Right. The casino worker that get's minimum wage forevermore and that's that.

But the fluctuations of mining meant that it was a two-day-a-week job just to do the paperwork on each employee.

Right, right. It was a mess. And then their rates are so unbearable, 24.75 percent for underground. The next closest is California, which is around 10 percent. Arizona and Idaho are around 4 percent. So if I was to bid a job, I couldn't come near anybody that's bidding from out of state. The first thing the SIIS people say is, "Oh, they have to carry Nevada coverage." Well, they have to after they get caught. By then, if there's a little job, they're done and moved out of the area. And that's the kind of stuff I was geared for—small jobs, not like these guys up around Carlin and through that area, which is going to be years of work. They can work that cost into their grand scheme of things. I'm hitting the jobs that are 200-foot a drift, and it's going to take you six months to get completely set up, do the job, and then torn down and completely out of there. So that was a big mess.

That was the worst. What else? What other kinds of rules and regulations had an impact on you as a small business person?

Maybe not any one in particular, just so many from every different direction.

What were some of the combinations then?

Well, the BLM Here lately, since the guys in Nye County shook him around a little bit, they're a lot easier to get along with. But you still have to take them out and babysit them and parade them around. Meanwhile, this is taking you away from your work. And show him what you're doing, what you should have done and could have done and would like to do. And it drags out to a whole day. You can't just say, "OK, this is it. See you." If they drive all the way out there, they expect to hang. They don't want to make it back to the office in time to have to do something else. And so you're stuck with them all day long I shouldn't say babysitting, but just finding interesting things to look at. And it just goes right down the line like that.

Well, the state I should throw something in for the state mine inspectors. These guys are, of any bureaucracy, these guys are just what I'm sure the people who came up with bureaucracies had in mind. Our guys with state of Nevada are just 110 percent. You've got one guy covering the same area as five MSHA inspectors. They do all the training, or they're capable of doing all the safety training, free, absolutely free. They'll lend you movies, help you out. You can call them up in the middle of the night for some kind of suggestions and stuff. (Well, you could. I don't want to antagonize them.)

Their guys, when they're hired, they have to have a certain amount of underground experience and a certain amount of pit experience, so you can actually rationalize with them. "I know we aren't doing this quite to the letter of the

law, but here's the reason, see. We plan to do this so that we can do that, which will make the whole thing safer."

Where the MSHA guys come in—this is some guy that might have worked in a coal mine in Virginia or just got out of college and, "Well, I'm sorry, but the law states that you are going to" You know, like they had a radiation leak down in southern Nevada, so all the MSHA inspectors go on in there. They pass federal legislation that they're going to check for radiation leaks, and they come parading around once a year to every mine and check for radiation—just asinine stuff. A lot of them, the MSHA people, the older ones are more like the Nevada inspectors. They've had enough experience, been around enough. But as these guys are retiring, they're being replaced by up-and-coming bureaucrats.

It's just getting worse and worse. You show them the mine: they really don't comprehend what it is they're looking at, but they know that the rule says, "You do this, and you don't do that," and down the line. And you're trying to explain an elephant to a blind man. I was going to say white elephant. It's something that they just aren't geared for. They're always stepping on the toes or in the way of the state inspectors, who, when there is a problem, the answer for the federals is always, "Call in the state."

You know, boiler inspectors come around to check all your pressure vessels, underground tanks like jack tanks [water tanks with compressed air] and receiver tanks [which hold compressed air]. Anything under pressure has to be inspected once a year. And to the federals, it has to be done, or they shut the mine down. Now, you're asking, "How do I go about doing this?"

"Well, that's your problem." But the state does provide that service. You call up Carson City, and they'll send the boiler inspector out, and he'll check it over and,

"Yea," or "Nay." He isn't going to stretch the law and say it's legal if it isn't, but at least they will send somebody around to do it.

With the safety training, MSHA, as far as I know, doesn't offer anything. They used to give out pamphlets and movies. They don't even do that anymore. But the state . . . your guys have to have a refresher once a year, and that involves four hours of first aid and so many hours of this, so many hours of that, which is all federal mandated. But the federals say you just have to do it. How you do it's your business, where[as] the state will send in EMTs or somebody that's certified in mine gases, just the guy for it. And they don't charge you a nickel for it. And then, if you have a problem on the mine site, you can call them up and say, "Boy, oh, boy. Now this is off the record, but we've got this weird problem going on."

And they'll say, "OK. Well there was a mine in this area that did this. And a mine over here that was in that situation, they did that." And they'll actually help you out. [laughter]

That's a level of regulation that's helpful to you, where some of these others were more time consuming, and you didn't see the results from it.

Yes, right. A majority of them are just making a job for themselves.

As a small businessman, how did it turn out in terms of your time in dealing in regulations versus getting actual work done and managing people and so on?

That was pretty simple. Everything combined would be about 100 percent of my time, or I hired somebody to do it. From time to time, I did hire somebody, because I felt I could either be out drumming up more jobs or pampering the bureaucrats. So I was stuck, because I'm on such a small scale. A big company, when they have a mining

deposit, has a land person and permitting person and on down the line: that's all figured right into the deposit. Now, will the deposit carry this overhead or not? Yea or nay. And if it does, they go. Where a small outfit, you're lean and mean, and everybody does four or five different jobs. So I would have to hire somebody to do nothing but that job or else do it myself, which then [means] I couldn't do *my* job.

Which would be getting more business or keeping the jobs on hand on track?

Getting jobs lined up, prying some guy out of a lease on his property, which was about impossible.

You ended up hiring somebody from time to time but, for the most part then, you did your own work on a lot of that.

I'd say well over half the time—close to two-thirds—I hired a gal, and the rest of the time I did it.

And how much of your time, even with help, how much of your time would you say it took up in a week?

OK, when I had the other gal hired, I'd say maybe a quarter.

Still a quarter of your time.

Because there were a lot of things that she couldn't do, or she could do, but I thought I was a little better at.

Would you say that your business was to the point where it was not feasible to keep the business going?

That was a lot of the reason. If there was more mining activity, underground work, going on I suppose it would be a little different. But yes, that's pretty much true.

Combination of reasons then.

The way that other people I know (I'm not going to mention names, but other operators that I know pretty well) are able to do it is a lot more cash deals, and don't let the bureaucrats know what's going on, and hope to Christ you don't get caught. They're still going along, but I've always had the kind of luck that I'm always the one who gets caught, so I chickened out. It's about impossible if you're following the rules, which I tried to do. But no matter what, you're still doing something wrong, and they change the rules almost hourly. So, yes, for a small operator, a combination of leasing and contract work in a small way is about impossible anymore.

Would you consider doing your business full-time again? Given all that?

Yes, I would. Under a whole different way of doing it. Now a very good friend of mine, Earl Harrison (see, everybody I've mentioned is just the tops) . . .

You have good choice in friends. [laughter]

I guess I've just been lucky. But anyway, Earl Harrison and I had a lease, which is called a split-check lease, on a mine up in Battle Mountain. The reason it's called split-check was the company we were leasing from owned the property and all the equipment, so they put up the mine and the equipment, we put up the labor and the expertise. All the consumables were taken off the top of our shipments, and then whatever money was left over was split fifty-fifty. The company got half, and then we got half to divvy up amongst the miners.

Now, other than that Earl's a great, great businessman, which I'm obviously not, one way we made that work was, we had that mine as a nucleus, so we could scamper out and do these other jobs. We had our pick of

the contracts that came along. Instead, if the mine had been solely on contracting, I would have had to take anything that came along. This way, we could take the plums, and normally we could get out and do the job and be back, and nobody was the wiser before anything was said or done. And that business was very, very successful.

We did really well on that, except the way the tax structure and everything was set up, a company has to keep expanding or else everything just eats you alive. And we expanded too fast. We ended up with five different contracts in Arizona. The mine was in Battle Mountain, so we were shuffling men and equipment up and down the highway constantly. Oh, we had more than five contracts down there, but out of the nine we had going, five we never got paid on, which all hit us at once. And you front a lot of expense—mining is horrendously expensive. And by not getting paid on those jobs We went to court, and money dribbled in slowly, but it wasn't anywhere near what we needed to make payroll and our expenses. So we tried pulling back to just Battle Mountain, but that mine still wasn't able to produce enough of a profit to cover all the bills. So it took years to get over that. We did get everybody paid off and all that. But, boy, it was just a factor that we grew faster than we should have.

Yes, but you would go back into that? With some limits on how fast you grew, because it works.

Yes, I'd do it in the same way that we set that one up—that we had our own mine as a nucleus, someplace to work from, someplace to bring our guys back to, and not strictly on contracting. You know, in my warped opinion, it just can't be done unless you cut corners, and I'm just talking small-scale contracting. There are some companies up in Battle Mountain, Carlin, up in that area that are doing very, very well, but

they've got long-term contracts. They know exactly what's going to be going on from year to year, or six-month period to six-month period—however they're setting these jobs up. There are no surprises. But where you're jumping from job to job, back and forth, and then trying to pacify each and all the bureaucrats along the way, it just can't be done.

And is that a change during your time in mining? In other words, when you started, a small contractor could make it, and now . . . ?

Yes. When I first started leasing and stuff, the bureaucracies were 100 percent behind the little guy without stretching the law, without making loopholes.

For Ione, since that's where I started out Oh, I ought to tell another part of that story of replacing Bill Overholster. The years went by, and it's been over, oh, gosh, twenty-five, twenty-eight years since that little incident up in Ione. Well, we met briefly as he was going and I was coming but never enough to get acquainted until we landed down here. And when I took over the mine foreman's job, I was going over the roster of employees, and I see this Bill Overholster and, "Holy moley. I wonder if this could be the same guy." I asked around the pit, "Does anybody know this Overholster?"

"Oh, yes, he's a nice guy. You'll normally see him down at the bar." So I went bumbling down to the bar, and he and his wife were there.

I walked up and said, "Do you remember me?" Of course, he didn't, but I told him all about [Ione]. Oh, man, it was old home week.

So he ran over and got his wife and said, "Do you remember this guy?"

And she says, "Vaguely, but I think you didn't have a mustache at the time."

I told her, "Well, it wasn't because I didn't want one." [laughter] So it's funny how things come around.

You were talking about back when you were in Ione in a small business.

The mine inspectors were always around, as they are today, but you had the old school of MSHA inspectors, and most of them had been leasers at one time or another, or maybe their relatives had been, so they knew the line of thinking—how things were done when you were on a shoe-string. And the same thing with the state inspectors. In fact, at that time, MSHA was better than the state in my opinion.

That changed, too?

Oh, yes. Drastically! And then "Forest Circus" [pun intended for U.S. Forest Service], at that time they had a blade out in the area that was a six-wheel-drive road grader with a little bulldozer on the front. They wouldn't go out and build roads for you, but if a road washed out into an area, boy, they were right there to open it up. The BLM was just unheard of. You know, this is BLM land, but you never saw anybody around. Pretty much the governing power for the federal lands was the Forest Service, and a good part of the permits and things that were paid went back into that district, see. So, boy, if they could get somebody out there picking pine nuts or mining or something, that was more money for them to put into maybe seeding an area, or for the crested wheat for the cattlemen, or putting in a picnic area, or something like that. So they were very, very supportive, and everybody knew each other. The ranger stayed in the area, and their kids knew our kids, where today they move them around, because they don't want them to get too well-acquainted and start doing favors for their friends. If a road washes out, well, then

it's a wilderness area from that point out. The whole idea with these wilderness areas is that's low maintenance for them, see. So they want everything a wilderness area: that's just the whole philosophy of the rangers.

Like when I was a little kid in Tahoe, for the forest ranger to come to your house for dinner was, "Man, this is the Boy Scout who grew up, and look at what he is now." It was like (to the people in the South) the preacher coming to dinner. The ranger of the area was the most highly thought of guy, but today, I can't say they're hated but . . . The rangers from earlier, they had to be able to ride a horse; they had to be able to pack a mule; they had to know something about the wilderness. Where today they're all a bunch of . . . I'm not flogging college kids, but they have no practical experience at anything.

It's what the Greenpeace people say, "The way it ought to be," with no concept of reality. People have to survive on the earth just like the ducks do, and you have to remember that the people who are living in an area aren't out to destroy the country. They have to live there and have for generations as well.

Because that's their livelihood?

Exactly, exactly. I was always proud of the fact that, around Ione, I got along very well with the Shoshones. By Indian culture, my God, that land is sacred. In Christianity, God made Adam the king over all the animals they saw, where in their [Native American] religion God made the Indians as caretakers, and they're directly responsible. So a little different line of thinking.

So when you started out in Ione, it was a whole different atmosphere, and a small business could survive. And now in 1996, only if you do it in certain ways is it even possible.

Right. What the bureaucrats are looking for is just like they've done in the logging business. It used to be all family-run, little logging companies, where now it's Weyerhaeuser and a few big companies that can afford to keep the bureaucrats there in a little trailer and keep a steady stream of paperwork going for them. This is what the bureaucrats can deal with. They know exactly what forms are showing up. It just tears them up to have some guy showing up and digging out a little hole and covering it up and going somewhere else. "Oh, my God, the extra work." They just don't want that, and it's been pretty well outlawed.

It's a real different attitude about work, too. You were explaining that the attitude in mining is that the more work you do, the more proud you are of it. And bureaucracy is considered generally . . .

Just the opposite.

You're seeing the opposite.

The less going on, the better. Yes, it's just a whole different . . . And I'm not just picking on the bureaucrats because it's fun, but you see that in general in everything.

Lots of other occupations, too.

Well, in those days I was lucky. I caught the very tail end of the leasers' type mining, the 1930s mentality. It's, "Everybody works." It's every guy for himself, but everybody works together to do it. Where today it's more a socialist attitude, "Don't think on your own. You're just part of the great work here, and we're all going to do this." And I think that really hurts the country as a whole.

There are some drawbacks to teamwork?

Sure. Where would Einstein and Thomas Edison and those types of guys be if they were just supposed to be a part of the grand scheme of things?

Tell me your title here on this job?

I'm just working in the grade-control department. I don't think there's any . . .

No title. [laughter] Sort of a vague title. Do you find now, working at the job you are at, do you feel a sense of independence and ability to make your own decisions? Tom Rinaldi [MRRI general manager] was explaining to me that this would be considered a small corporation.

Yes, and that's what's fun about a small company, because you're expected to wear a number of different hats, and you *have* to do this, and you *have* to do that. It's not because it's just a good idea so, "Today, we'll go blundering out and do something." Here, if you're going to make the whole thing work, everybody's got to take a little bit of the load, and there's no room for deadbeats. Maybe as the company grows and becomes some humongous company, I'd probably quit and go to another little outfit. But at this point in time, it's fun, it's exciting. I'm involved in all aspects of . . . who knows what may be going on that day, and that makes life exciting.

And you still get that sense of contributing and having control of your part of it, which is one of the things that you described really liking.

Yes, that's what the underground is all about. So as far as open-pit type . . .

You're able to have that independence and yet be a part of a . . .

Right. Grand scheme of things.

Yes, an organization that can handle some of the regulations and so on. It's really about as ideal as you can get right now, given what you like to do.

That's right. So that's what's fun and exciting about a little outfit like this.

Yes, Monday mornings aren't so bad in a business like that. You look forward to it.

You bet. Yes. The more hectic, the better.

That was one of the things that I picked up, is that this isn't a place where people wring their hands when things get lively. This is a place where everybody gets kind of . . .

You better jump in and start bailing the water quick. [laughter]

[laughter] Well, that's the main thing that I was looking for, was the experience that you had with running your own business, as well as working for other businesses, and of the changes just in your lifetime, like what has happened to the regulations. It's been phenomenal.

Oh, it's just overwhelming. And what's amazed me is, I'd never worked in California. I did about a year ago. I'd always wanted to mine in the Mother Lode country just because of the name, but I always kept away from California, because I had heard such horror stories about all the bureaucrats. As luck would have it, about a year ago I got a little contract to drive some drift over in California, so me and my Pirate Crew loaded up, and away we went, and everybody was right. There are just droves of bureaucrats, but they are a lot more docile than they are here. They were always showing up, but they seemed like they wanted to see the thing go. You know, they had their agenda to take care of, but they

sure wanted to see the mine, and they were excited to see, "Boy, this guy really helped out Eldorado County." It wasn't just this mentality of, "Well this is the way it's going to be." Man, it just completely took me back, because it was 180 degrees out from anything I had ever heard about California.

It was more like they had an investment in the success of the operation?

Right.

But you don't get that feeling here?

No, no. Because the . . . well, I don't know why.

It's a different feeling when you feel like you have the bureaucracy supporting you rather than . . .

Yes, fighting. Well, they don't fight you. They're just there. It's like trying to pull off leeches, and they're sticking faster than you can pull them off.

OK. Is there anything else that we should cover on regulations?

I think we pretty well covered that and stayed out of jail.

[laughter] Do you feel like you have to watch what you say on that one? You have to keep working with all these bureaucracies, really.

Right. Right.

And yet, this is the feeling, this is one of the issues today—how does everybody work together, because the bureaucracies . . . ?

Well, they have their own agenda, and they do their own thing. You just try to put up with them as best you can. They aren't

for you or against you. They produce nothing, but they absorb a lot. If they were like the state mine inspector, man, . . . well everybody hates to spend money, your tax dollars, but when you see it coming back in that kind of help, you figure, "Well, it's OK." And I'm sure there's lots of people who just hate the state inspectors, but shoot, in all the years I've been at it, I've always gotten along great with them, and I think that's money well spent.

Have any of the regulations that you can think of made improvements?

Yes, some of them, because it used to be the promoters would come up in the country and just tear the hell out of everything, and all for a stock show. No mining, nothing in mind other than a stock scam. They put an end to that, which is great. I couldn't be any more for it. If it's a real mining outfit, whether it's a lease or big corporation, they have everybody in mind. You know, look what Mineral Ridge [Resources] will do for the local economy for a hundred years to come, even though this may be a short-term project, and I'm all for that. But when somebody just comes in and rips the whole side [of the mountain], like some of the stuff you see around Ione, just Cat roads all over the side of the hill for no reason

And no repair work afterwards?

Right. Right. They just vanish into the night. Everybody's opposed to that, but what they've done is they've not only put an end to that, but they put an end to a lot of honest exploration.

So it's almost like the laws have passed that fine balance where

Right, it's the way the pendulum swings. It had swung completely one way, so now it's

swinging completely the other, with neutral being in the middle.

So there is some balance that still needs to be worked out, from your perspective anyway.

Again, from my point of view, I'm sure.

Well, and you have an important point of view, because you have the view of someone who's had your own business; and from the view of underground mining, seeing the mining industry change, going more often to open pit.

Well, what we hate to see so much is that we've got an expertise that has been developed well over 100 years, close to 150, that's all going out of the country now. But most of the companies, other than a few junior companies like this, are putting a few token geologists in the field to make it look like they are still active in the U.S., while they're all going to Chile and Africa and places that are looking. And those people don't want to just give away their environment, but they want the technology, the jobs, and the assets that are produced. I hate to see that kind of flow going out of this country. Where before, the hub for the industry was Virginia City. That expertise went to Tonopah, back to Virginia City, and then it went from Virginia City to Goldfield and back to Virginia City. It stayed here [in Nevada], and it helped the whole area. And now it's just flooding out of the country.

So we're losing some of our country's real experts in this industry?

That's right. In South Africa today, they feel that selling their technology almost represents half of their gold income by doing consultant work on deep mining for other countries. But here, this country, it's pouring out. The biggest joke in the business

right now is, "What do you call a roomful of geologists? Spanish class."

[laughter] Because that's how dramatically it's changing. It's not only that the world markets are impacting the price of minerals here, but it's cheaper to go and get the minerals somewhere else. And so all of the people who want to keep mining have to go . . .

Where the work is, and it just isn't here anymore.

The work isn't just in Ely. Instead it's in South America or South Africa . . .

Right, or whatever. There are a lot of other countries opening up.

Do you want to go out of the country?

Not especially. I will if I have to.

Do you think you might have to, somewhere along the way?

I don't know. I've been offered a couple of jobs in China. Seemed pretty fun, but I kind of wanted to see how the Mary Mine turns out.

Yes, that Mary Mine's been intriguing all along, hasn't it?

You bet, you bet.



BEN VILJOEN

From a videotape session with Merle Swanson and Thomas R. Rinaldi held at the ruins of the Blair and E.L. Cord mills and the Oromonte Mine.

[At Blair, Nevada]

BEN VILJOEN [V]: The whole town [of Blair] was built entirely around the mill, so once the demand for labor was gone, when the mill had folded up, they dismantled the mill, hauled it out on the railroad for scrap, and the town died real fast afterwards. There was no other reason for a town. Plus, they had no water or power after the mill was down. A lot of the buildings were hauled to Silver Peak or Weepah and other surrounding mining camps, and the ones that weren't hauled away just fell down over the years or burned down. All that's left of Blair are the foundations and some of these concrete walls.

VICTORIA FORD: *Is this typical of what happened to mining towns in Nevada?*

V: Pretty much, yes. And in more recent years the tourists have ravaged them. But it's pretty typical that they moved buildings back and forth, here and there. It was just incredible how mobile things were in those days.

And parts of the mills, too?

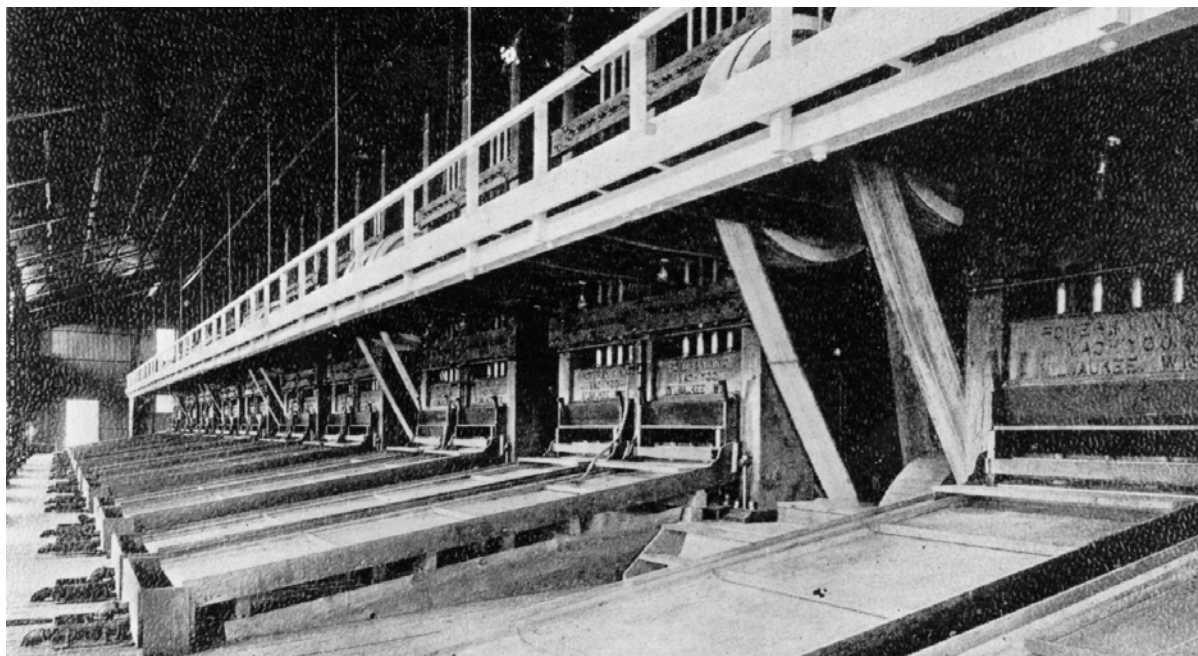
V: Yes, mills were moved here, there, and all over. The Cord Mill started out at the town of Como, out at Dayton, Nevada. It was dismantled, hauled over here, and then after the war forced the closure of the Mary Mine, the mill was dismantled and sold. I forget where it went, but it was sold as a tungsten mill. There are probably parts of it still being hauled up and down the highway.

[At the E.L. Cord Mill.]

THOMAS R. RINALDI [R]: What is this?

V: I think it's a bucket elevator.
[pause]

Ben, would you describe for me how it was operated? Where the ore came in and so on.



"The whole town [of Blair] was built entirely around the mill. . . . There was no other reason for a town. . . . All that's left of Blair are the foundations and some of these concrete walls."
 The Pittsburg Silver Peak Gold Mining Company 100-stamp mill, Blair, Nevada. (Photograph courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society, Acc. # ESM 807.)

V: OK. Well, this was an updated version of what we just saw down at Blair. As times progress, the technology advances, and so after Blair died out, then the Cord people (the same Cord as the automobile) came in and decided to try to lease part of the Mary Mine and build a mill on site. The basics of this are pretty much the same as what went on in Blair, only with a lot more modern equipment.

And what type of plant is this?

V: This is sand leach. Basically, the ore was brought in on the trestle up there from the Mary underground. The primary crushers, or jaw crushers, were up on that end. It was crushed there, and then they had conveyors. Up behind you is where the fine ore bins were. The ore went from that, probably, down into a cone somewhere, and that big foundation there was the ball mill where the ore was ground to, say, a hundred

mesh: that'd be kind of common for those days.

Describe what a hundred mesh would be like.

V: A hundred holes per square inch in a screen, like very fine beach sand. So from there it would come out of the ball mill, go through some nugget traps which were laying up against the wall over there to catch the very coarse gold which cyanide has problems with. Then it would have gone onto amalgam sheets, which is probably this bench right below us. From there it went down into the mill. Where you see the big stack and the steel room in there was the refinery where bullion was poured.

I guess we ought to follow the slimes first. This next bench down here was flotation. That process wasn't very amenable to this type of ore, so it wasn't used very much, and the benches below, which

you can't see from here, were the sand tanks. The slimes would be put into those tanks with cyanide sprayed on top. The pregnant solution would be drawn off and brought up to a thickener, and the preg solution would then go into that caged room, which they used the Merrill-Crowe system of precipitating the gold out, where zinc is exchanged for gold in the cyanide solution. Normally, you get thirty-two ounces of gold per pound of zinc, so it's [a] pretty good exchange. And then as the gold precipitates out, it's run through a big filter which catches all the precipitate, and then that solution is taken back into the mill as barren, or probably up to the ball mill as mill make-up water. It's rerun because cyanide is so darn expensive. You do anything you possibly can to save the stuff.

From there, once a week or however often, they'd make their pours, the press would be broken down, all the filters taken out of it and taken into the refinery where they poured their gold bars. The filters were washed off so that gold would also be recovered. So this operated very efficiently at about 350 ton a day right up until War Order [L]208, which shut down all non-strategic metal mines in the United States for World War II. The Comstock financed the Civil War. Tonopah and Goldfield financed World War I. World War II, they thought they'd fight it on credit and shut all the gold mines down, so we're still paying for it. This was a cyanide process like what our company's going to be doing. People like to look at these things as historical monuments, but all they are is an evolution in the technology. What we're going to be doing on top of the mountain is just kind of the next chapter in the same old book. As times advance, so do milling methods. So this is a 100-percent upgrade from the Blair method, and then what we're going to be doing is an advancement on that.

If you look through that old window, you can see some tailings along the hillside. That

would be called the tails launder or the tails flume. What they did during that process, after all the gold had been taken out of the vats or out of the slimes, they'd be washed out of the tanks into the launder, which is a milling term for a flume, and it was taken around the side of the hill and dumped into the canyon. Down lower you can see tails spread out in the valley. People think that's a big ecological disaster, but the two things that neutralize cyanide the fastest are sunlight and oxygen, which we have lots of here, and so the old-timers' method was to spread the tails out as fine as they could, over as big an area as they could, so that a lot of wind and sunlight would get to them. And they'd usually neutralize within a few days. Where the policy today with the EPA and everybody is to put them in a fully contained area that's got a clay liner, plastic on top of the clay, and then clay and plastic over the top of the mill tailings so that they stay poisonous for the next thousand years, because the air and sunlight can't get at them, but the bureaucrats have a job checking them. [laughter] So that's that—had to get a knife in.

Would these tailings down here still be toxic?

V: No.

R: They probably weren't toxic by the time they got there.

V: The water was just as precious as the cyanide. It was pumped all the way from Silver Peak, which is about the same elevation as the valley bottom down there, only about two miles to the south in the valley, and then probably another three or four up here. I understand a very famous mining family called the Smith brothers got their start here by maintaining the water. They had the contract of maintaining the fountains and pipelines.

And that water was really as valuable as the cyanide. Then it was recycled?

V: Oh, yes. They would squeeze You can see that manifold laying down there, that round deal with the holes in it. That's the manifold off of an Oliver filter, which is a big drum with canvas on the outside of it. The tails would go into a trough where that drum is turning very slowly, and it's like one revolution every eight minutes. And as it goes into the tails, they have a vacuum line that draws the tails up against it, sucks the water out of them. Then, when it gets to the top, dead center, there's a pressure side which blows air in to push the canvas out, and it goes across a scraper and peels the tails off. Then it's dry enough that you can't even squeeze them together and have them stay together. A little bit of fresh water would be added, just enough in order to get them down the flume and out the end. So every bit of water and cyanide possible was saved. Everything here was operated by electric power, which was brought in from Bishop off of the Goldfield line.

You mentioned something about the floor—when they poured the gold bullion, that part of the floor is sand.

V: Around the furnace you can see it's sand. If molten metal lands on concrete, the concrete explodes. That was the reasoning behind that. A lot of the slag you can just pour out onto the concrete floor, but it explodes because of the moisture in the cement.

Well, Blair was a whole separate entity—the second phase in the evolution here. The very first was the amalgamation mills, and then from there, when cyanide was developed, the Blair Mill was built. When Blair was discontinued, the mill torn down, then the Cord interest came along within ten years or maybe even less. They used the most state-of-the-art milling process pos-

sible. Up here you can see the old ore bin, which was originally used to put ore on the aerial tram that went to Blair, was incorporated in this mill and was used as an ore bin for the Black Mammoth interest. They hauled their ore down to Silver Peak and ran it through their mill, while the Cord people brought their ore out on that trestle and dumped it into the ore bin that came through the mill, so they milled their ore right here.

One time period kind of folds over the next one. The foundations of everything that was involved in the aerial tram was torn down, except for the ore bin, and then the foundations for the newer, modern mill were built right on the foundations of the aerial tram. It's just one evolving into the next.

R: [laughter] Because this is really a twist.

V: It is. And then who has the apex right, if that lithium is coming out of these micas up here? [laughter] [Referring to Cyprus Foote Mineral lithium production from the playa outside Silver Peak.]

R: We do.

V: You bet you. [laughter] They owe us some royalties.

R: I'm going to talk to Bart on Monday. [laughter]. I'll be sure to mention that.

V: That'll be a good one.



V: The Black Mammoth Mining Company took their ore into Silver Peak, and it was run through the two mills that were owned by the company—the Vollmar Mill and the Black Mammoth Mill. The Black Mammoth Mill today is part of Cyprus' mill—the older part of the building. In the 1960s, that mill was bought by Foote

Mineral, and all the gold-milling equipment was taken out, and their lithium-milling equipment was put in. And as the mill was expanded around the building, they pretty well buried it. But you can still see what's left of the old Black Mammoth Mill, which is now Cyprus Foote Mineral's mill.

And Cyprus mines what?

V: Those ponds you see out in the valley, they pump lithium water out of the valley, and it's put into those ponds to evaporate. As the density of the water increases, it's pumped from pond to pond until it ends up a heavy brine. The salt is dropped out of it at the final stage, and then the brine is pumped up to the mill, and they take lithium out, which is used in drugs, and I guess the biggest market is a hardener or alloy to be used in aluminum for aircraft.

The Black Mammoth Mill was operating when the Cord Mill was operating?

V: At the exact same time. The Black Mammoth Mining Company bought the wreckage of the Pittsburg Silver Peak Company, which was Blair. The Black Mammoth Mining Company was out of Manhattan, Nevada, a very successful company up there. They moved down, took this property over, and then, in the late 1920s I think it was, they leased out the southern half of the mine, which we refer to today as the Mary section of the mine. It was called the Prescott Cord Lease section of the mine. That was leased to Prescott and Cord who built the mill here. But all through that time, Black Mammoth was operating and milling ore through their own mill.

R: What was that you were saying earlier about the people in Silver Peak?

V: Oh, Fred Vollmar was a very famous promoter, maybe not quite as famous as

Rice and George Wingfield and these characters over in Goldfield, but he was certainly almost as good as them. He was one of the first in Nevada to buy an airplane. He'd fly to Long Beach and promote a bunch of stock, and when the people in Silver Peak saw his plane coming back to town, they knew everything was well. They'd have plenty of money to operate or do a bunch of development. They'd be hiring, and things were all fine in the world when Vollmar flew into town. [laughter]

He was a colorful character.

V: Yes, he was a character all right. He was half Paiute, which I guess was very common in Silver Peak, because of the summers. Well, it was such a miserable place to live, so hot and everything, that they couldn't get white women to live out here. So most of the guys married Indian gals. Anyway, one sure cure to promote stock was, he'd fly down to Hollywood (or drive or however he'd get there) and tell people . . . all these movie stars and hot-shots in Hollywood, that his ancestors had told him about great gold mines in the wilds out here and, boy, they'd flake out the money. When he'd come back to town, he and his dogs ate steak, and when the money ran out, he and his dogs ate rabbit. [laughter]

He was more of a promoter than a miner?

V: He was a very shrewd mining man. His father, Fred Vollmar Sr., was called the father of cyanide in Nevada. He was one of the pioneers in the cyaniding business. So Fred Vollmar Jr. was no slouch at all as a mining man. He flat knew his business and his mining. He had two generations involved in it. But he had that gift of gab to be able to go talk people out of their very last dollar, and that kept the mine going. They were able to develop areas of the mine that an

average promoter couldn't have gotten the money to finance. And then he had a number of other companies around here: Nevada Development and the Indian Mines Company and the Calumet Company, which were all surrounding the Mary Mine. So he would kind of rob money from one company to finance another. They had different ways of getting money that's kind of illegal nowadays.

Tell me about the house you live in now.

V: Well, it belonged to Fred Vollmar Jr. at one point. I understand the place was built by the Warner brothers, that Vollmar was able to promote the Warner brothers into having a nice little place to get away from it all during the winter out here. It's such a mild climate. I understand they had big tennis courts (none of that exists anymore) and basketball courts and beautiful gardens. That way the Warner brothers could gather up their favorite secretaries and spend a week or two in Silver Peak. And after they kind of lost interest in Silver Peak, they had assessable stock in those days, and the assessment on the stock ate up the value of the house, so Vollmar ended up with it. My wife and I bought it. Since that time it's gone through quite a few hands and gone downhill quite a bit.

It's still the same basic house?

V: Yes, the house is basically the same, with a little bunkhouse right next to it and then a barbecue room with a copper roof on it. Other than that, all the rest of the big gardens and all of that are all gone. Oh, it's got the only private swimming pool in town, which Vollmar would drain whenever he was out of town, because his wife didn't know how to swim. So she came in drunk one night and fell in the swimming pool, and it darn near killed her. She broke her back,

and I don't remember what else. If there had been water in it, she'd have been OK.

Is the swimming pool still there?

V: Yes. It's not in very good shape, but it's still there. It's kind of a hazard if it's anything.

Is Fred Vollmar's ghost there?

V: Well, no. [laughter] His ghost, I guess, has better places to hang out than Silver Peak. [laughter]



Ben, tell me how you got into mining.

V: I've just always been interested in it. It's the excitement when you're a kid. Probably the only job that you can get into where there's the chance of going out into the hills and striking it rich. And from there, just growing up around Virginia City and the Tahoe area—we grew up in the Tahoe area, but visited Virginia City a lot and other towns. So it was just the excitement of, if we behaved long enough, that we got to go to this great mining camp. One thing led to another, and I sure wouldn't trade it for any other profession.

How old were you when you had your first job?

V: About fifteen or sixteen, hand-mucking at the Utah Mine in Virginia City, which was called the Sutro Mine Tour [the mine also offered tours to visitors] . . . not to be mistaken with Sutro Tunnel. Those mines up there were a little backward, but we were still using carbide lamps and doing hand-mucking and doing everything the old fashion way.

So you learned the old way.

V: Yes, yes, and I was so delighted to see the new methods.

You were?

V: Oh, boy! A mucking machine against a shovel? That was just too good to be true. [laughter] And then later on, from air muckers to rubber tires underground or load-haul-dump machines.

You said it took you a while to learn mining. Can you explain that?

V: OK, well, hard-rock mining is like any other trade. It takes many years and a lot of moving around to learn all the different aspects of it. It isn't a job where you just pick it up in a matter of months and you're off and running. There are so many different types of mining and so many different types of ground that to be a contract miner or considered a miner you have to have worked in many different conditions and many different places. You normally start out as a top lander or in a job on the surface framing timber, working on the equipment, which gets you familiar with what you'd be working with in the future. From there, you go underground and become a skip tender; or busting boulders on a grizzly; or a nipper, which is kind of a handyman, a kid that runs around and gets pipe fittings and dynamite and this and that. From there you team up with somebody as a miner's helper. Miners always work in pairs, and then as time goes on, you start learning—driving drift, running raises, sinking a shaft or a winze, or timbering. And some guys find that they enjoy nothing more than sinking shaft or driving drift, and that's what they'll do for the rest of their lives. Where a contract miner can do it all—maybe not as good as a guy that does nothing but sink shaft all of his life, but you can sink shaft in any conditions and more affordably than some guy just breaking in.

You learned underground mining, then, in the beginning?

V: Yes.

I would like to have you describe what it's like to be underground in a stope, mining.

V: Oh, well, it's the greatest life there is, because most of your pay underground revolves around contract prices. The company determines what a drift should cost to drive, so they'll pay you your day's pay plus so much a foot to get the job done faster. If you're a good drift hand, you can make double or triple a day's pay by producing that much more work. In a stope, you're paid normally by the cube—how many cubic feet of ore you knock out. Or if they're really worried about grade control, they'll pay you by the ounce—so much an ounce to keep the grades up real high. In a lot of professions, say the post office or boxing groceries at the store, you hear the employees talking about how many hours they were able to hide out before the boss caught them. When you overhear a group of miners talking, they're all bragging about how much they got done that day, because they're paid to do more and do a better job.

As far as what it's like, your heading is your palace. They take you down there, the shifter or the mine foreman says, "This is your area. We need this, this, and this done, and have at it." There isn't somebody standing there holding your hand telling you how to do it. You can do everything just the way you want to do it, and everybody leaves you alone. If they can see you can't handle a job, they find somebody that can, and you're breaking rocks on the grizzly again. It's a life where you take the situation in your own hands.

As far as relating it with open pit, you're talking apples and oranges. They're entirely different. The concept of underground is producing. You think of everything in



“As far as what it’s like, your heading is your palace. . . . There isn’t somebody standing there holding your hand telling you how to do it. . . . If they can see you can’t handle a job, they find someone that can, and you’re breaking rocks on the grizzly again.” Miner with gold vein, Silver Peak. (Photograph courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society, Acc. # ESM 822.)

ounces—how many ounces you’re going to produce—where open pit is volume. Normally, it’s a very low-grade deposit, and the key to the whole thing is to move many, many tons. And the more you move, the faster you move it, and the more efficiently, that is your profit. Where underground, you leave all the waste there, and you just take the ore. So your tonnage is very low, but your ounces are high. Where open pit, your tonnages are very low for a small assay. So I personally like the underground end of it, because that was always my preference. There are other guys that just love open pit and think you ought to go to Truckee Meadows [mental hospital] for even

considering underground. So, every rat to his own crack, so to speak.

Is there much opportunity to do the underground mining anymore?

V: Not as much as there used to be. Well, it’s picking up again, up north in the Carlin area, and they’re finding that you can only efficiently open pit to a certain depth. Pretty soon your stripping ratio comes up to a point where it’s no longer affordable, and now there are mines that are going underground. And then, in areas that are environmentally sensitive like Virginia City, there are no mines going on there now. But

if there were any mining in the future, it would have to be done underground because of the historical nature of things up there. So it is coming back, but not as . . .

When did you start working on open pit? Is this your first one?

V: No, it isn't my first. I've worked in a number of them over the years. First would probably be the late 1970s. Some barite and a little bit of scheelite. And, well, even before that at a mercury mine but never real big ones.

You talked about mining being in your blood. Could you talk about that?

V: Well, I guess probably most guys would agree that, at least on the hard-rock end of it, once you get involved in it, it's hard to shake off and throw up your hands and go to work at Raley's, because for so much of it, you are your own boss, and you're paid on what you produce, and there's so many possibilities out there. Normally, mining pays quite a bit more. The basic day's pay, whether it be pit or underground, pays a heck of a lot more than most other jobs. And not only that, but most mining companies offer incentives to go on to college or take a course or do something on the side. So the benefits are so many versus the other jobs that are out there, say gaming or in a store, where you probably stay at about the same pay scale forevermore, and it just doesn't offer much of a future. In mining, you move around a lot because the mines are quickly worked out, and you move on to bigger and better things, but there are so many more incentives there.

Was it hard for you to make the change from underground to open pit?

V: Yes, because everything's completely backwards. Underground, you get

under the ore body and work your way up. In the pits you start on top and work your way down. There are a lot of adjustments, but it's still mining, and everybody likes moving dirt around. We're all kids at heart.

Is this project as exciting as your first job mucking?

V: [laughter] It's a heck of a lot more exciting than that. [laughter]

Why is that? Let's talk about the excitement of mining.

V: Well, here we're taking something that everybody else has thrown their hands up on. I was one of the fortunate ones that has been here since Homestead, when the last company fell by the wayside. I have been involved with the exploration, the drilling and sampling, metallurgy—everything that goes into a mine. In the past, normally, I've worked at a mine that's operating. You'd go in, and you knock it out and go on to something else. Here, I've been able to be here from the exploration stage and help work the thing into where it is a very viable project. And then, to be able to see that actually go on-line and to see if those ore bodies are there exactly where we thought they were and as rich or, of course, probably richer than we were hoping for—that's all exciting. The hand-mucking was new and different, but it's still hand-mucking. [laughter]

Are you hooked on mining?

V: Oh, definitely, yes, yes. There's no rehab for the mining business. Once you make your first dollar, or when you actually sell some ore or some mercury or doré, it's a feeling like no other, because you've taken something out of the earth and made a product that is going to be used throughout the world. It's going to benefit all of

mankind. Here it was something that was completely unknown before you came bumbling along and knocked it out of there. And that's a really good feeling.

You've been in Silver Peak since 1989 this time?

V: Yes.

Is there something different about Silver Peak from other places that you've been?

V: Oh, yes. Every town's different. Silver Peak is a real nice little community. It's very typical of the boom-and-bust cycle. They're in a bust cycle now, because the only show in town is Cyprus Foote Minerals. When the Mary shut down last time, they lost probably two-thirds of the population of the town. Now the mine will start up, and they'll all be back or a good part of them. But it's a nice little community. People like to chip in and help each other out, have town barbecues and Fourth of July. Whether you want to be involved in the local politics or not, you're just kind of sucked in. So it's a lot of fun.

Has that happened to you?

V: Oh, you bet. Yes.

What are you doing in local politics? What ways have you gotten involved?

V: Well, I'm running for county commissioner. That's something I would have never dreamed of any place else. [laughter] And then, the wife's in the Women's Club.

So you've really gotten to be a part of the community. Is that different here than other places you've been?

V: Yes. Silver Peak's sole support is from mining or the minerals industry. There is no tourism, no agriculture, nothing else. In other communities over the last hundred years, they have established the town tradition and the way things are done and everything kind of goes along. Where Silver Peak, it's fast and furious as a population goes up and down, and everybody has to help, like working on the water system. It's easier, and it's more fun to get involved.



You helped map the underground of the Mary. Could you describe what that was like?

V: Yes. That was real exciting. We did have some real crude maps. They had to figure out the volumes of the stopes, so that the ore that's been mined in the past could be deducted from the ore bodies in their block models. Then it was just the excitement of getting back into these areas that no one's been into since the 1930s. We were always expecting to find some real neat old artifacts, but, boy, the guys that cleaned it out did an excellent job. We didn't find a darn thing—a few antique bottles and stuff like that but no old mine cars or candle holders or any neat stuff.

How many miles back in there?

V: We figure about fifty-six miles of workings all together.

When was the Mary last worked underground?

V: Well, the last real mining would have been when it was shut down because of World War II. And then there's been a few stabs at it since then, either under-funded or just promoters. Let's see, in the 1970s, there were two different groups that tried going back in there, but they never actually got into the mining end of it. The Oromonte

(right here) was operated in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. Mark Gavard and Jack Zane out of Mina operated this. But the real serious mining was all halted because of the war, which was pretty much the history of all the underground mining in Nevada and California and probably most of the West. The prices of labor went up so fast after the war, and the price of gold was regulated by the government, so it wasn't profitable to go back into the mines.

What is right behind you? What are those?

V: OK, that's the Valcalda Mill site, which was built in the 1870s or 1860s. Water was brought . . . piped from the Valcalda Spring and siphoned all the way

down here. I think it's nine miles over there. The foundation is all cut stone: that was before concrete. That's why you see so much concrete around Blair, because that was new and exciting, so they made their houses and everything out of the stuff. But that mill's very old, and we're going to be guarding it. There's very few left like it throughout Nevada—very few mill sites that are in that good of shape.

Was that the first here in this area? The first mill?

V: In the Oromonte area, not the Silver Peak area. But it would rank right up there with the very oldest anywhere.

EDWARD M. TOMANY

EDWARD “ED” M. TOMANY was born in Tonopah and raised in both Silver Peak and Tonopah. He remembered every inch of the Mineral Ridge Mining District from traveling often with his father to the mines and listening to that generation’s stories about the area. He heard tales of wealth so elusive that it was like searching for sunken treasure, and he saw a washtub of gold that was given away piece-by-piece to friends. But what made Ed’s story truly unique was that, at the time of this interview, he served as the Chief Administrative Officer, Mine Inspector for the Nevada Mine Safety and Training section. It is a position some might consider “the other side” of the relationship between the mining industry and government’s regulation. However, Ed recalled the very moment when his circle of family and friends endorsed his new government job.



EDWARD M. TOMANY: I was born and raised in Tonopah, essentially, outside of going to school one year at the university in



Reno and being in the service. I was born in Tonopah on January 25, 1945.

VICTORIA FORD: And what is your connection to Silver Peak?

My father [Donald Andrew Tomany] and mother [Anne Banovich Tomany] met in Silver Peak and were married in Silver Peak, and we were living in Silver Peak. From my understanding, I’ve been told I was one or two years old when we moved to Tonopah. My mom was a schoolteacher in Silver Peak in 1936 and met my father, who was mining

gold at the Mary Mine in 1936 and also at the mining camp of Nivloc, which is west of Silver Peak. My mom and dad lived in Nivloc. She taught school in Silver Peak, and she would haul the kids to school from Nivloc with the silver bullion on the school bus.

How many kids did she have in school?

You know, I asked her, and I'm sorry She passed away in 1985 or so, and I know she'd told me, but I don't recall. But it was a small, little school bus. That was kind of a different angle on things for today—to haul the bullion with the kids on the school bus. And she would drop the bullion off at the post office and take the kids on to school and teach school and then bring the kids home in the evening.

Interesting. So she did everything. She was school bus driver and teacher and the works.

Yes, and she was the janitor at the school after hours and schoolteacher during hours and then the bus driver and the armored car.

Do you know the story about how your parents met in Silver Peak?

No, I don't, except that I know there were a lot of old family friends that are still The Del Papa family—Joselyn Del Papa was a schoolteacher with my mom in the Tonopah schools for thirty years. And, in fact, Joselyn retired with thirty-eight years in the Nevada school system and three and a half years in the Louisiana school system. Her mom was from Louisiana. But Fred Del Papa and his family (his mom and father and brother) were raised on the Del Papa mining claims on top of Mineral Ridge at the State Bank claims, and they lived at

the Campenella claim and at the spring, and that's where they were raised.

Can you describe where that is, say, from the Gordon-Brodie Mine?

From the Brodie, the State Bank claims where the mining transpired was roughly one mile west of the Brodie claim. And then the Campenella was less than a half a mile north of the State Bank claim, so the Campenella is slightly north and west from the Brodie claim. And, of course, the Brodie family I think Jack Brodie, the son, is still alive in Fernley. I've sent people over to see him, because he is the last of the Brodies that I am aware of.

That's a beautiful location. There's a little spring just east of the Brodie property—I think, Tarantula Spring—and then there's water at the Campenella Spring. It was just minimal amounts. There wasn't water sufficient to support mining at all, so the water for the mining operations was brought from Valcalda Spring, which is several miles west of the Brodie and Mineral Ridge properties, and that came by pipeline.

And that's what your father would have used when he was up in that area?

Yes, they all did. In fact, the water at the Campenella claim is not fit to drink. Animals drink it, but human consumption I don't know if you could consume it by boiling or not.

You've mentioned several names here. Let's start with your dad. Can you tell me what you know about his mining career in that area?

Yes, I can. He originally was a leaser at the Mary Mine. In fact, he was one of the last leasers at the Mary Mine. And at that time in the Silver Peak-Mineral Ridge area there were a number of small operations besides

the Nivloc operation and the Mary Mine operation. Of course, they had the mill in town. In the Tonopah and Goldfield-Silver Peak area is Montezuma Mining District, which is between Silver Peak and Goldfield, where there were numerous little mining operations—family operations. He mined with a number of the old-timers out there at that time—Jimmy Gavin and the Chiatovich brothers, who were very prominent first settlers in Fish Lake Valley.

So he would have been working with Stanley Chiatovich?

Stanley and Jack and Pat and Bob. Bob was the youngest. Bob died very early—in his early forties. And Pat just passed away about two years ago. His wife is still alive in Tonopah, Judy. But Stanley and Pat and the whole family—the Chiatovich brothers and my dad, Jimmy Gavin, Harvey Humphrey, Ernie Shirley, Fred Del Papa Of course, Frank Del Papa lived in Tonopah and then later on moved to Las Vegas. The attorney general of the state of Nevada today is Frankie Sue Del Papa. Her father was Frank. She spent her grammar-school days in Tonopah, and then they moved to Vegas where she graduated from high school.

So the two of you grew up together?

Yes. Her mom, Marie, is still alive in Las Vegas. And, of course, her aunt Joselyn in Tonopah is still alive. Joselyn was married to Fred, who is her dad's brother.

There's quite a story there. In fact, one of the old-timers of Tonopah mining, very prominent, old mining history gentleman, Norman Combs, who just passed away within the last month There was quite an episode over the Del Papa [claim] when Fred Del Papa passed away in 1967. From the time I was a kid, I would go with my father and Fred Del Papa to Mineral Ridge, faithfully, every time that my dad could

sneak me in the truck, back in the 1950s. I can recall being up on that mountain with Fred Del Papa, my father, George Boscovich, and Manhattan Dutch in the early 1950s on a regular basis as they tried to rediscover the gold.

The history of the Del Papa claim was ironic. Fred Del Papa's father (it was a very small, single-family operation mine) was drilling one day and doing the normal mining methods: drill, blast, and muck using rail cars. Of course, that was unknown for underground—muckers and trucks and things like that. Everything was referred to as rail operations, where we had rails and ore cars, hand-mucking and ore-mucking machines in the mines. But the family operations were hand-mucked—you drilled and blasted and then shoveled or mucked your cars full. To listen to Fred talk about this experience, it was that kind of gold fable that you've heard stories about. They blasted, went in to muck it up, and there was gold splattered all over the walls. And they actually had to sweep it up, shovel it up, and it was tremendously rich.

They had the last forty-eight pounds of that, which was kept by Joselyn Well, Freddy kept it from the time that his dad had discovered it. And they kept it in a washtub in the basement of his house for all of the years that I grew up and up through the mid-1970s. And it was not uncommon for Fred Del Papa (he co-owned the Ace Club in Tonopah with George Boscovich) in telling everyone about the gold properties and his family's property out there and the history, that he would bring the tub out and let you select with a pair of tweezers a piece of gold that you wanted. You didn't have to pan it or anything. You just reached in there, looked at a piece that you wanted, and you could take it out of there.

Joselyn could tell you how much was recovered, because in the mid-1970s she asked me what she should do with what was remaining. I, of course, had no idea how

much was left in the tub, but I told her the easiest thing to do would be to refine it—take it and have somebody process it for her and just collect it as a souvenir. So she had Norman Combs do that, and she could tell you today how much he actually recovered. There were minimal amounts there, but that was after thirty years of picking out of that tub. Tremendously rich.

I spent all of my time with my dad when he could take me with him, and then, even after we moved to Tonopah, we would go back, and he would continue to lease. He leased at the Nivloc. He leased at the Gold Wedge. He leased at the Mary Mine. And then we prospected all of my life out there. That was his main source of income until about roughly 1956 or 1957. Then he became involved in the Del Papa-Boscovich ownership of the Ace Club. Later on he became a deputy sheriff and then was elected as the sheriff of Nye County. Actually, he was appointed as the county sheriff of Nye County in either 1966 or 1967 when the sheriff, who is a very good personal friend of our whole family, was killed in an accident. The deputy was appointed as the sheriff, but he and the other sheriff were both killed in an accident, and my father was appointed as the sheriff. He fulfilled that term and then was re-elected. He retired . . . actually, was defeated in an election in 1976 and then became the chief of security for Hughes Tool Mining Division. Now, when Howard Hughes bought all of the mining properties in Nevada, then my father was in charge of the security for the lab in Tonopah and properties in Tonopah and Manhattan. [Although this was prior to Howard Hughes's death, Ed does not know whether his father personally knew Hughes.]

And so he was involved in mining for about twenty years in the Silver Peak area, from the 1930s through most of the 1950s?

Actively, and then he prospected with Del Papa until the day he died. We spent every day. It was a ritual, because we maintained the Del Papa claims for Joselyn until she sold them last year, and we maintained those for her all of my life after Freddy passed away. And, of course, before Freddy passed away, we assisted him, so we were an integral part of that for all of my life.

And during that time, was it primarily as a leaser and prospector that he worked in the Silver Peak area?

Yes, ma'am.

And you accompanied him as a child.

I sure did. And then he also leased in Tonopah at the Mizpah until it closed in 1948. He was one of the last leasers there. But, yes, he was employed by the companies out there—by the Mary Mine company at that time, and I believe that was probably (I don't know this, actually, because I have never checked the dates) the time E.L. Cord was the operator of the mine.

And Fred Vollmar Jr.? Was he around?

Fred Vollmar Jr. was a very close friend of my father's. And, in fact, he owned a beautiful home there in Silver Peak, which was to us growing up in the 1940s and 1950s . . . It had a swimming pool in the yard. I mean, that was unheard of—a private swimming pool at a residence. And he had a beautiful home in Austin, Nevada.

Fred Vollmar was instrumental in mining throughout Nevada. A lot of people only remember highlights of Fred Vollmar being a mining promoter, but he was actively involved in the development of mines besides being a promoter. A lot of folks can tell you that every dime Fred Vollmar ever collected was put back in the

mines. You'll hear that from more than one person that knew Fred Vollmar personally.

Can you tell me a little bit in detail what you know about some of his work in the Silver Peak area, because it's true that a lot of people refer to his promoting, but very few have mentioned his development work in mining? Could you give me some specific examples?

Specific examples? The original Silver Peak mill, but that was an undertaking of his father. But thinking about Fred . . . I have the only photo of Fred Vollmar and some mining investors. Unfortunately, that's at the Apex Mine in Austin, and a lot of folks aren't aware of it. That was actually the sole uranium producer in the state of Nevada—a mine developed by Fred Vollmar at Austin, Nevada, the Apex uranium mine. And I have an original photo of him with investors. We used to fly up there all of the time with him, my father did. My dad did a lot of contract work for Fred.

But in the Silver Peak area, Fred was instrumental in the mill work there; development of some of the Gold Wedge work, some Mary/Drinkwater work, Nivloc, and up at the Mohawk.

That was a close-knit family, so to speak—the developers, promoters, and the miners. They all were one family.

The Shirleys, Chiatoviches, your father, the Brodies, and so on, they were all very close-knit and all working together?

All of the time. They may individually have been working at their own property there, but that was the basis of the community—the development of individual properties or one that was more fortuitous than the other.

And that group sort of jelled in the 1930s, am I right?

Yes, ma'am, 1930s and 1940s.

So when your father first started in there, they were still actively working together, when you were a kid in the 1940s, early 1950s?

Yes, they were. Bob Chiatovich . . . and Hugh Cameron was a nephew of Fred Vollmar's. That group remained active until the day they died, like Hugh Cameron and, of course, Louie Shirley and Pat Chiatovich and Jack Chiatovich, the older Chiatovich brothers. They simply disappeared from the scene due to age. I mean they were active . . . like Fred Del Papa, he would ride in the truck with us when he couldn't walk. We would get him in the pickup, and he would drive with us out there. When he couldn't physically get around, he was still with us. It was incredible.

They hired an old prospector from Manhattan. They called him Manhattan Dutch. I don't recall his real name, but you could go back through the obituaries and find that. And Del Papa . . . Freddy and George and my dad and Pat Chiatovich and all of them would hire him. When they couldn't any longer or were working themselves in the 1960s out there, then they would bring Manhattan Dutch out and leave him for a month to do all of the assessment work, and then we would pick him up. We would bring him out in the early spring and then pick him up somewhere around August. He lived in the Del Papa house at the Campenella place during the summer.

Did your father's work survive through World War II when they shut the mines down?

L208 [War Order L208 closed the gold mines and required only mining of strategic minerals during the war]. And then war materials were needed, so he moved on to

Montezuma and leased for lead-silver mining. That was a war material, so that was permissible. Gold was the only thing prohibited from mining in L208. Lead and silver and mercury could be mined. He and the Chiatoviches moved over to B & B mercury mine over in Fish Lake Valley. They worked around wherever they could.

Do you remember or know the specifics of how the lease relationship worked? Could you describe that?

Well, I know from my father the actual wages they were paid. In some cases they were paid a minimum daily wage, and then they always were paid by the number of cars shipped. And by the number of cars shipped, we're talking about railroad carloads. At Montezuma they were paid by the carload, which was the railroad-car shipment. And then, individually, at the mine they were paid by the ore carload, how many cars were trammed if you were in the drift or in the tunnel. If you were in the shaft, like at Tonopah, then you were paid by how many ore cars were hoisted full of ore.

I talked to Mike Donovan one day when I met him up on top of Mineral Ridge while he was working surveying. I brought to his attention that I have a photograph of Mike's father at his mill when it was active in the 1940s—1946 or 1947, in Silver City. One of the very few pictures of his father at the mill works, standing outside on the mill works. I can remember Dad talking about Mike's father, Bill Donovan. Apparently, during the war (and Mike might be able to shed some light on that), Fred Del Papa and my father, the Chiatoviches, George Boscovich, and a number of the leasers in those areas were out trying to get contracts for people to process their ore, one of which was the Donovan Mill in Silver City, because there were no active mills in Tonopah. All of those mills had closed. There was the mill at

Sodaville. There was a gentleman (and he may still be alive) that could relate some of the old names, and his name was Claire Zakinga. There's an operation that was called the Nevada Mineral Processing at Mina. It's the first mill on the right as you go into Mina from the north, and that's where he was. He was at several mills in the past, but Claire Zakinga would be one who would have received orders years back to do milling. There was a mill in Silver Peak, of course, but there were no mills in Tonopah.

Was the mill here in Silver Peak operating during the war?

I actually couldn't answer that for you.

But back to the lease relationship, so they got paid by either the ore cars and/or the railroad cars that were shipped. Did they also get a percentage of the value of the ore?

Not to my knowledge, no.

And so, it was more like daily wages?

Daily wages and bonuses for the amount of work that was completed. In other words, just as today what we call contract mining and bonus operations where you actually get paid for footage, they would get paid for footage with incremental bonuses to be up on development.

Was there still a sense of working as an individual, though, as a leaser?

Yes, there was, because what you made depended on your work.

On your work and where you happened to be in the mine, whether you got a good section or not?

Yes, that would be favorable, obviously. But you could get paid for development, too, and at a higher rate. There was a lot of misunderstanding in some of that contract mining where, if you received shares and values of a mine, you were obviously to benefit if you were in a rich area. But because you weren't depending on the mine and the location, you could also make above and beyond daily wages by being a good miner, being very prudent, being very good at your job, and developing above standard. So you could get paid for that extra development that you did above and beyond a normal day's salary.

Do you have a sense about your father's skill? Would you consider him a good miner?

I can recall when they would all visit together—when we would visit at Jimmy Gavin's or at the Chiatovich home or at the Del Papa home or the Boscovich home and at the mines . . . just like today, everyone's kidding each other about what they used to do and how they used to do it. Numerous times they referred to having near accidents, where they had premature detonations of the blast when they were drilling and shooting, or where they drilled into a missed hole. In one mine accident that they used to kid my father about later on, they thought that would be his last day mining. That was at the B & B Quicksilver in Fish Lake where he was nearly killed in a cave-in. And he used to speak of that. He had a very near miss there. The slab just pushed him to the side instead of crushing him, and it blocked the mine for a considerable time. It was without warning, because they used to discuss that.

When he took me underground, he always told my mom that I would wait in the truck, but that wasn't the case. And, you know, from early on I was always told what I should be careful of, and where I should sit,

and what I could and couldn't do. And there were times when I was actually left in the stope, and they would work. When my dad leased at Montezuma, my brother and I pushed the ore car for him. My dad was in the winze, down sublevel of the drift, and he would muck the bucket, and we would windlass the bucket up and dump it in the ore car, and then we would push the ore car. My brother is one year older than I am, and I was not even ten.

Your father was a very respected miner, but everybody was aware of the dangers and the accidents?

Absolutely.

What kind of an impression did that make on you as a kid, to hear about those near accidents and that your father had almost been killed?

It was a part of life back then, and as each year went by when there was a mine accident, everybody was familiar with what probably happened. When I was in high school, one of my classmates, Jerry Sickles's father was killed in the Mohawk cave-in in 1961. And he's entombed there with two other miners. They were never found. They couldn't get them out. Those accidents, even later on, they related to all those things that I had been taught and told from the time I was ten.

. . . about safety. So you could always trace what had gone wrong when somebody was hurt or killed like that?

Yes, we could. We would always hear the story. You always hear "a cave-in," but there's more to a cave-in than a simple collapse of the ground. As we learn today in courses: was the ground not properly supported? Those were conscious things that we did when I was a kid, and I was with

him. We always checked ground support. We always had to be careful of where we entered and where we were working and what we disturbed simply from ground conditions. So that was inherently, as it is today, a part of mining.

You've gone on to work in the area of mining safety?

Yes. I didn't know that I would back then. Originally, when I graduated from high school—I graduated from high school in 1963—I intended to go to the university and major in chemistry and physics. With the mining activity that I had participated in and the knowledge that I had even in high school of mining and geology, which I loved, it never entered my mind to even think to pursue that. And now I find myself here, thirty years after graduating from high school Well, actually in 1978 or 1979, I incorporated a mining geologic consulting company in the state of Nevada, and I contracted all over the state and outside of the state in Idaho, Utah, and California and even did a couple of jobs in British Columbia. And yet, at the time of going on to further my education, not one time did it enter my mind to pursue an earth-science, geology, geophysics, or mining-engineering degree. Not one time.

Tell me your title and what your job entails today.

Well, as chief administrative officer, the Mine Safety and Training Section oversees mine inspections for the state of Nevada. Our agency was created by the legislature in the state of Nevada in 1909. I'm pretty proud of that when we look at the relationships between state and local governments and federal governments. Our state agency, which was created by legislature in 1909 to oversee health and safety of the miners, was an integral part of the history of Nevada

through the Comstock Lode and Tonopah and Goldfield and now today the Carlin gold belt and all. And I think Nevadans can be proud to think that this state undertook that process for the health and safety of their miners in 1909—something that never came about until the Congressional Mine Act of 1977. So we had some sixty-eight years of experience before the federal government chose to influence health and safety of miners in metal/nonmetal mining in this end of the nation, so I think that's good. I'm not one for the federal government maintaining anything. I think it should all be on a local level.

So even when your dad was leasing at the Mary Mine in 1935, 1936, these laws were in effect?

The state laws. Yes, ma'am. In the 1940s and 1950s and 1960s. The deputy state mine inspector for that district down there was Leonard Traynor, who was one of my father's best friends. And at that time the state mine inspector was Mervin Gallagher from Virginia City, Nevada—very prominent family in Virginia City. It's ironic . . . little did I ever think that I would participate in any part of that. I played basketball against the Gallaghers in Virginia City when I was in high school. Thinking about Leonard Traynor and his association with this division and the relationship with my father and those names that I mentioned to you, that was one tight-knit group, all of them. Leonard Traynor, even though he was the deputy mine inspector, before that was a participant with the Chiatoviches, the Shirleys, the Del Papas, and my father in all of that mining development. And so that's . . . to me it's just . . . I catch myself occasionally. I can't figure it out.

It's a mining community that goes beyond just Silver Peak, the greater Nevada

mining community that you're talking about?

Yes. This is now the Mine Safety and Training Section. It was created by the legislature as the Division of Mine Inspection. And it was the Division of Mine Inspection until reorganized by state government about four years ago, when they did our name change, and we were placed under the Department of Business and Industry. But prior to that, we were a division by itself, and the inspector of mines was an elected position in this state up until the I want to tell you it was in the 1960s. It could have been 1970s. (Being in this office today, maybe I need to get into more of that history, but I haven't. We're very busy here, so I don't have a chance to sit down and archive our history.) And I have a poster from when Mervin Gallagher was running for that position, and he was elected to that position several times. And then he was followed by Harry Springer, who was the last [one elected to that position]. And I believe it was changed by Governor O'Callaghan—when we went from an elected position to an appointed position.

So you're now in a position where, when Mineral Ridge Resources is opening their mining operation at the Mary and the Drinkwater and setting up in that whole Gordon-Brodie area, you know that area like the back of your hand, because you worked up there all of your life.

Yes, I do. All of my life.

And now you're going to be helping them with training and safety and inspections?

Yes, ma'am. From working and sampling to hunting where we used to spend on our off time. We would go to Tarantula Springs and hunt chukars. It was not uncommon to see

just beautiful mountain sheep over there, and I understand they are still there. I know I still go to Silver Peak at least a couple of times a year with my wife just to show her where my dad In fact, when my father was alive—he just passed away four years ago—we had taken him along so she could hear those things. And he used to tell us where individual miners lived as we would come up the Mary Mine road. Sunshine and Moonshine Johnny and the Brodies and, of course, the Del Papa family. It's part of history to me every time I drive up that road. I just wish that thirty years ago I would have had the insight to record more information than I can recall today, because it was just . . . like drinking coffee today.

You just take it for granted. But he talked about it a lot, so was it an important part of his life?

All of the time, while we were out there and when we weren't there, when we were at home.

He was an amateur boxer on the professional boxing card when Max Baer fought Big Ed Murphy in Silver Peak. And my mom kept the original fight poster: we have the original fight poster. And my dad fought a gentleman by the name of Cotton Dean, who was a local miner at Mineral Ridge. And there were numerous of these people—Dynamite Newman, Cotton Dean, other locals who have remained and since passed away, a number of them. But there were a lot of those same old miners who then went on to other places.

Little did I ever think that I would meet Cotton Dean in person some forty years after the fight. One of our best friends in Tonopah was the proprietor of a gas station there, a Union 76 gas station, Joe Maslach. One day a gentleman came in Joe's station, I would say around 1982 or 1983, and he asked Joe if he was familiar with some of the residents in town. When Joe said yes, he

mentioned my dad's name, and Joe immediately called me, and it was Cotton Dean. He was retiring then. He had been employed as a mining engineer for the last twenty-some years in New York City and was in charge of the development of the underground water-sewer distribution systems. Spent the last twenty years in New York, underground.

Were you at the Baer-Murphy fight when your dad fought, or was that before . . . ?

No, that was way back in 1936.

They say it was close.

Yes, they did. We actually have a photograph of my father fighting in the ring and the fight card to the poster.

You've talked a lot about your dad. Let's talk a little bit more about your mom. She taught in Silver Peak. How long was she a teacher there?

In Silver Peak itself, I don't know. I know that her first assignment teaching in Nevada was at Ursine, Nevada, which is just east of Pioche, Nevada. She was there a year and then came to Silver Peak. Now, how long she was there, I don't know, but I know that my sister was born in Hawthorne, Nevada. Incidentally, when the L208 closures came about [War Order L208 closed gold mining in 1942], some of those miners went to Hawthorne and helped build the ammunition depot there. I know my dad was on the crew that went over and helped pour the cement bunkers, and Hawthorne was where my sister was born.

My parents met in 1935. My sister was born in 1950 in Hawthorne. Probably, they spent a good seven or eight years or more in Silver Peak, and then she [Mother] taught in Tonopah for years and years and years. And then she taught in Goldfield and became

superintendent of Esmeralda County schools. And at that time she frequented the Silver Peak, Dyer, Goldfield schools, and her best friend out there was Alberta Merritt.

And that was the second episode so to speak with my mom in Esmeralda County schools, because the earlier part was when she met my father and they were married, but then this later era was in the 1970s.

Yes, because I think Alberta arrived in Silver Peak in 1959, and she says, "I was going to stay here six months, and forty years later it's my home." She always talks fondly of your mother.

Yes. And then her daughters, Linda and Leona, both became school teachers. Linda is a school teacher in Vegas . . . has been for twenty years. I don't know where Leona is.

Your mother must have loved teaching.

She did, and she loved being out in the rural area. When she became superintendent of the schools in Esmeralda County, of course, it gave her freedom to go to Dyer. She was Esmeralda County Superintendent, but she was also the school teacher in Goldfield. It was a two-teacher school.



Freddy and my dad would name the properties, and some of the episodes and incidents that happened—where the bunkhouse was, and where they stayed, and those types of things—as we would go up the road. Back then they would discuss that thing that you don't see and haven't seen out there in thirty years, and that was the influx of miners. Even though it was evident that there were miners all over that hill, it would have been something to see. That was before my time. Of course, now we're going to see another episode, but it isn't as if the miners live up there like they did.

So when your dad first went there, the miners lived up there?

Oh, yes. A majority of the miners.

Did he live up there?

Well, at one time, yes. They stayed at the bunkhouses at the Mary Mine. He discussed in detail the cook shack and the bunkhouse when he was at the Oromonte. I guess all parents probably did the same thing when we would ask, "My God, there's not much there. How did you keep warm?" Well, they cut a lot of firewood. And he would tell about the cold winter days and no mention of the comforts of life at all. But that was history throughout the nation—not everyone owned a car and not everyone owned their own home. And the style and the progress of all of these living conditions, it's just been a dramatic change following the war.

So, for example, do you think that your father had any electricity up there?

Well, they didn't up on top of the hill. They may have at the mine and at the bunkhouse, but they didn't when he was leasing up at the Oromonte. They didn't have power in the cook shack. And Del Papa's never did have power at their home on the Campenella claim—wood heat and kerosene lamps. There never was power over there.

In the Brodie, of course, it was in disrepair when I was a kid even, but I'm just assuming (because Brodie had the mill and all) that there might have been a power source right there for the mill operations. I'm not familiar with it. I'm sure that there was.

And water was piped in or hauled in?

Water was always piped in or hauled. Well, a lot of residents in Silver Peak hauled

water clear up into the 1970s, because the water quality wasn't good in the town itself until the city drilled fresh-water wells and developed a better source of water for the community. That didn't happen until the 1970s.

Did your dad live up at the mines when he was single and then move into town when he married?

Yes, he did. Exactly right. Except they did both live at Nivloc.

And do you know what kind of house they lived in at Nivloc?

Just a description from my father and my mom—they were typical mining camp houses. And I would be under the same assumption there as I was at the Brodie and the Mary. The power (if there was power) was produced at the mine and for the mine, exclusively, right there. There wasn't power distribution that went anywhere except for the mine community.

So there was a big change for a man if he went from being single to married in terms of living conditions? He went from a bunkhouse to a home.

Oh, absolutely.

As a kid, I thought that was a joke—that it was just someone's nickname, when, in fact, there was a Moonshine Johnny and a Sunshine Johnny, two brothers, miners. And then, when you look at those living conditions, where they lived in dugouts along the road . . . But they were not alone. There were many, many dugouts.

Not everybody lived in a house or a bunkhouse? They lived in dugouts, too?

Dugouts. Those dugouts are still there.

Were they at the entrance of a mine, or was it just dug out for a place to live, period?

Well, I couldn't answer that, except that maybe at some point in time, early on, maybe someone started to dig a tunnel and then converted it and said, "Well, let's dig a house here." I don't know how that was created.

But he pointed those out to you as you drove up?

Absolutely.

What did those look like to you in the days when you first remember him pointing them out? Were they just a hole in the side of the hill?

Well, they put a face on them with a door and a window. They were in disrepair, of course. You couldn't live in them. But the doors and the windows were there then. And now most of all of that is caved down, and the windows are broken, and probably the doors are off. I know they were years ago. I'm expecting that's still true. (I'm trying to think of somewhere where I had seen those in pictures, even when they were in better condition. And I'm trying to think of who had those photographs.)

Moonshine and Sunshine Johnny weren't alone. The Dynamite Newmans and the names . . . all of them. There were numerous places as you would drive up. It was like a tour. That was a steep grade after you left the Mary Mine to go on top to Brodie, Oromonte—that's a very steep grade. And you would pass these as you went along. "And so-and-so lived here, and so-and-so lived there."

And, of course, when I was a kid, the mine tram (the train that hauled the ore from those properties on top to the Gold Wedge and the Oromonte and those) would come along that trestle and rail and then

dump ore into the chutes, which would then be dumped down from the Drinkwater to the Mary to the mill. In some cases they actually went through the mine. There where the dugouts are, they had big pipes that they would dump into, and the ore would go down those pipe chutes to the next ore bin and then down to the next ore bin. And there were places where it actually was dumped down into the mine chutes, and then it would be hauled out on the main hill at the Mary to the mill, so gravity did all of the work. And then there were places where you could be loaded by truck off the road.

That was all in place when I was a kid. We could go up there, and the engine and several cars were still on the track but not operating. They were parked right there, out in the open, out in the weather. And today . . . well, if you're going to park it, then maybe secure it.

And they just walked away, left it, and went to another place to work?

Yes. That was kind of early on, when I was seven, eight years old.

You've mentioned that whenever you could, your dad would take you with him and that you would go down in the mine. It sounds like your mom wasn't in favor of that.

She was not happy with that. Her father died of miner's consumption. My mom's maiden name was Banovich. My grandfather, Mike Banovich, moved here from Yugoslavia because of the unrest. That still goes on even today, if you can imagine thinking back to how things have not changed. And that was through the time when Tito was in regime over there. My grandfather moved to Tonopah around World War I, 1917-1919, with other fellow countrymen. Nevada is littered throughout its communities with Slavic miners, and

many of those are in Tonopah; they have their own community Ely also has a large number of Yugoslavian-Czechoslovakian families.

He came over for a year or two, without the family, to get work and ended up in Tonopah working in the mines. He brought the family over, with the exception of my aunt who has passed away. I think my mom was born in Tonopah. But he only lived there a couple of years. He contracted miner's consumption, silica dust, and died.

From what I am reading, that was a real serious problem in the Tonopah-Silver Peak area.

Yes, it was. Probably the heaviest in the state. He died very, very young—very early. And my grandmother [Miryna Banovich] moved the family back to Yugoslavia. They were back there less than a year when my Uncle Dave . . . my Uncle Bill said that they were moving back to Tonopah, Nevada. She sold everything they had, and they came back to Tonopah.

My uncle, who is still alive in Fallon, Nevada, Dave Banovich, is a retired sheriff of Churchill County. He's the last remaining part of the Banoviches. My Aunt Kayo, Catherine Banovich-Lydon, passed away. My Uncle William Banovich, who was chief of security for American Metal Climax for thirty years in Climax, Colorado, at the Leadville Mine, passed away. And, of course, my mom, and they had a younger sister Kay, who died very early on at fifteen, twenty years old.

Was it because of losing her father at a young age that your mom was against you being around the mine?

I would guess, yes. I can recall my mom always saying that she wouldn't have the rest of her family die in the mines. I didn't understand that as well then as I do today.

As a kid, it was exciting. There was adventure. And it still is, but there's a lot of danger with that adventure.

By the time that your father came along, was he using any protective gear for the silica dust?

No.

But he didn't have a problem with it?

Well, they changed mining practices, too. One of the biggest engineering changes was the use of water for drilling. That's where the majority of the problems were centered. Not that there weren't other sources. There were. But the majority, the largest, most devastating source of the silica dust consumption for miners was drilling dry—referred to as drilling dry without the use of water to moisten and settle the dust and the silica.

And so, by the time that your father was working there, they were doing the wet drilling?

Wet machines, referred to as wet machines. But for many, many years there was nothing but dry machines. Then later there were dry machines being used, but you didn't want to get caught with a dry machine. If you got caught by the mine inspector with a dry machine, as you would today, he would turn it off. It would be removed from the mine, converted or removed for health reasons.



There was a whole group of folks that their pastime was in organized boxing as we know it today, as a sport, amateur to professional levels. And Nevada has a tremendous history on boxing . . . early boxing that originated in the Tonopah-Silver Peak-Goldfield area. For instance, Dan Skanovsky, who is still alive and lives in

Tonopah, could tell you about that boxing history. Nick Banovich, not related to our Banovich family. Leonard Traynor, the very Leonard Traynor that I am telling you about, a boxer. There were just a lot of folks. Jimmy Ray, Cotton Dean, who my father fought.

Did they train?

Oh, I know my dad did. He used to talk about it. I used to kid my dad when I was a kid about, "Well, how did you do that?" because this was after the years where he was very active as a miner. But he made it real clear that that's what they did when they had the mine competitions. Where today we have drilling-rock competition, well, they had boxers from the mine. They were miners, and the guys in the mine wanted them to fight the guy from that other mine, that type of thing. They were employed in a very strenuous work to begin with.

So mining work was part of the training, because they were physically fit from that?

Right. Physically fit. My dad said that on days where he had extra time, he would walk the Nivloc road or walk the Mary Mine road, where we jog today. The Nivloc, I can understand that, but that's a hike on the Mary Mine road. That's not a walk: that's a hike. Vertical distance there.

That would help strengthen legs and help with aerobics.

Oh, absolutely. That was part of working at the mine, too.

But he didn't talk about having a place where he worked out with punching bags or anything like that?

No, not organized in that fashion. But physical training, yes, besides working at the mine.

OK. And it was more a competition between the mines then. It was, "Our guy can beat your guy," type of thing?

Absolutely, local rivalry, like today on the football rivalries across town. Well, that was rivalry across the mines. And you select your boxer, and a number of these people went on to become professional boxers, small scale. But like Big Ed Murphy, all he was, was a local miner. Fought Max Baer, my God, heavyweight champion of the world! So it isn't as if it was just a dream or a hobby. Some of these people went on to become pretty good boxers. As they tell me with my dad, he was a great boxer.

I can tell you who might be able to give you some history and actually give you some pictures of that last group when they were together is Bob Perchetti, who lives in Tonopah. He's a part of the governor's tourism [commission]. He organized local boxing events in Tonopah in the 1970s. He brought the old-timers together, and he was a very good friend of my dad's. He may even have photographs of those last groups of the old-time boxers. Buddy Traynor, a very prominent business man in Reno, who was a brother to Leonard Traynor, the mine inspector, he would have photographs of that last group when they were together as gentlemen some thirty, forty years later. And I can remember that. I attended those with my dad.

Did you ever see your dad box?

Nope, but he taught me how to box. That was the kind of thing that you did growing up.

So he taught you the skill?

My brother and I. He bought my brother and I boxing gloves and used to put us out on the sidewalk to practice.

With each other?

Yes.

And with him?

Yes. I think it might be an overlooked part of mining camp history . . . today as we view rivalries between basketball and football, that was boxing then—across-town rivalries, mine-to-mine, community-to-community.

In reading about the Baer-Murphy fight, that sounded like an unusual event, yet you were aware there were other fights. This makes boxing sound like very much a part of the mining community.

And it was, like the Gans-Nelson world championship that was fought in Goldfield, Nevada.¹ Boxing was an inherent part of Nevada's history, and it's tied to mining in all of those mining camps that I know. Goldfield . . . that was brought on by the gold producers of the mines who brought that match to Goldfield. So in some fashion, as you would look at gaming and tourism today in this state, that was how it was. It was just a different commodity.

1. After a grueling forty-two rounds, Joe Gans won the World Lightweight Championship in the Gans-Nelson fight held in Goldfield, September 3, 1906. It was the first fight staged by promoter Tex Rickard and was staged to sell Goldfield mining stock. *The Magnificent Rube: The Life and Gaudy Times of Tex Rickard* by Charles Samuels (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1957).

A type of recreation, entertainment, and social gatherings—everything rolled into one.

Yes.

Regarding the Mary Mine . . . I used to question my father about some of these things. I know the Mary Mine in the late 1930s was the largest single gold producer in the state of Nevada. There was the Cord lease at the Mary Mine. There was also the Prescott lease at the Mary Mine. And the operating company for the Mary Mine at a point in time actually was the Black Mammoth Mining Company. Even though the Black Mammoth was a mine of its own, the Black Mammoth Mining Company was also a very prominent operator of the Mary Mine as a company.

You mentioned the excitement of mining as a kid, and I would like to have you describe that to me.

The fact that my dad was employed, and that was a profession and a job for him, the excitement to me was the fact that we went out and actually participated in this thing, which was work for him. Of course, it was work for us. I was just a kid, but I guess it was the adventure of being unique—that I pushed an ore car, and I filled an ore car, and it was hard work, but I accomplished something. I learned to fill an ore car and dump one, but that was exciting. There wasn't anything else. When I was growing up, outside of organized sports at school, there weren't recreational activities after school. There wasn't TV. There weren't all these things that you have today. And that's where my energy was channeled. Where did you channel it, if you didn't do that? I couldn't answer that for you. I don't know what the other kids did. I really can't, because our friends and family, that's what we did.

Was Silver Peak significant in your life?

Yes, it was. Today, even the mere fact that we're going to have a reorganization, redevelopment of the Mary Mine—that's where my father used to work. But also that historic link that went right on through that mining district. There were a number of very prominent mining people of Nevada there—E.L. Cord was instrumental in a part of the development of the Mary Mine. And I'm very fortunate to think that I can trace my father and my mom to Silver Peak and all of our friends. Politically, looking at today, who would have ever thought, I sit in an office that oversees that industry today, and it did at the time of my father's employment. And at the same time, I spent my grade-school and high-school times with my father and his friends at Silver Peak, one of whose niece went on to become the attorney general of the state of Nevada. [Frankie Sue Del Papa]

So Silver Peak's descendants have had a big impact on Nevada?

Yes. The Vollmars, Fred Vollmar and Hugh Cameron, not only in Silver Peak, but also development of the Apex uranium mine in Lander County at Austin, Nevada, and development of the White Caps Gold Mine in Manhattan, Nevada. That was all Fred Vollmar—he was involved in numerous of these. But it was always the same group. I mean, these miners were very familiar faces. Mining, as large as the industry is today, we find so many old faces that we have seen and met in so many different places through the years.

So would Silver Peak represent the starting point for these people?

Well, it most definitely did for the Fred Vollmar group, my family, and the

Chiatoviches. That's where they started, all of them.

And was it different from other mining communities?

You know, when I think back about that, I've had people ask me, "Did you know this fellow in Ely?" And I would say no, but I'm sure if we went to eastern Nevada, to Ruth, McGill, and Ely, we would find that same . . . there's no question in my mind, because I have met a lot of those people. And you would also see that in Eureka. Their areas were developed much as the Silver Peak-Goldfield-Tonopah area was. It was developed by mining—by commodity, supply and demand, and, of course, government control, price control. Absolutely. You would find that very true of the Kennecott people in Ely, McGill, and Ruth.

Incidentally, there's another connection for you. There is a Chiatovich still alive that you could speak with and that's Dr. Jaci Chiatovich-Jones.

Right. In fact, I just interviewed her, but she does not remember as much about Silver Peak as her older sister, Janice Johnson, who was just here from Idaho. We just had a visit last week about it.

Well, they were very good friends of our family. I don't know if she mentioned it at all.

Oh, yes. She remembers you. We've had a good conversation with her and with Barbara Dodgion here in Carson City, who is also a Chiatovich. Jaci, Janice, and Barbara are all sisters.

When you were first talking about your work here and following in the footsteps of some really significant people, that seemed to touch you. Can you tell me why, what that means to you, being a part of that?

Well, I didn't expect it. Mining was always a very important issue in my life . . . in my entire life, our family. But I didn't perceive that I would be involved in a regulating agency that historically is related to all my family's friends. That's just incredible to me when I think about it. When things come up, when I see the names and recall the places, those are things I have lived with my whole life. I still do today. I still meet and see families that Mike Donovan, my golly, with Silver City and the Donovan Mill. While they're personal friends, they're also history. I know who Mike Donovan is, and I know who Bill Donovan was. And I have a picture, one that Mike doesn't have. It's so interrelated that it's incredible in some cases—the relationships, like with the Del Papa families, and they just go on and on and on. And yet, I've never gotten away from them. I guess that's the reality of it, to sit here and think of all of the things that I did in my life—where I went and where I worked and what I did—and, yet, here I am right back into the very history that I came from. I've never really gotten away from that. By default I'm still here. How that happens, I don't know.

That miner's blood kept pulling you back?

My wife and I have the original stock certificates, for instance, at the Nivloc Mine. That's history to us. I have some of those things that are just so tremendously valuable to us but of no monetary value to a lot of people, probably.

Was your father alive when you started in this work?

Yes, he was.

What did he think of this job?

I went to work in 1991, and one of his best friends in later life was Leonard

Traynor, the deputy mine inspector at the time that Mervin Gallagher was the administrator of this division. And I'll never forget when my dad came to my office in Tonopah. (There's a field office in Tonopah which still exists.) And he came to my office with two of his best friends. At that time it was Norman Combs and Dennis Hill, very prominent . . . was the Democratic party chairman back in the 1970s or 1980s, but was very active and instrumental in the development of mining properties in this state, as Fred Vollmar was, only on a smaller basis. But a lot of people are not familiar with the Hill name. Very prominent, Denny Hill, very nice man.

They came to my office and looked at me and said, "Well, now, we want to tell you how this works. Leonard was one of us just like you were, and he helped us get our mines in shape and producing, and we don't expect anything less from you."

What was the message there? That you were going to be helping? That you're not on the other side of the fence: "You're still part of us."

Yes, yes. Even though I'm regulatory, I'm still in the group here. I have a job, and even though I envision the job to be other things demanded by law, which we do and will always do, and they respect that, that I also have an obligation to assist. But as I tell everyone, including the people who work in our office, that's an easy thing for us to do, because that's a mandate by legislature. Specifically, in the law, besides the fact that we will inspect annually for the health and safety of mining in the state of Nevada, it states that we will provide technical assistance and consultations to see that operations work. So that's an easy mix for me.

That was a real moment of recognition of your transition to government while

remaining a part of the mining community?

And then I had all of my friends There are some right there at Mineral Ridge. Terry Tew is the mine superintendent. He calls me up on the phone, says, "I can't believe this. You're going to regulate me now?" We're friends, but I have a lot of those friends throughout this whole state that are in mining, that are integral parts of our industry and its success today.

But they know what our office does, and that's not just me. I'm very fortunate that those are friends today, who I worked with and met through the years. But they know that they can get that assistance in this office today. Not to say that they couldn't yesterday, but in many cases with a lot of these people, we had a personal friendship long before I ever went to work in this office.

Helps to keep it from being an "us and them" type of thing between government and mining?

It sure has for me, and I would hope they feel that way. I would think that they do, because they call here regularly, and our people assist them and do their job as required by law. And I've enjoyed it. I couldn't have asked for

There's a lot of work, and our industry is growing. This is a big industry today, and technology has grown and all of those things that go with it. While the industry and the technology and changes are going on, life still goes on around you, and so there are a lot of those other things that have expanded and developed—some have assisted and some haven't—in the process of mining. There are some of these things today that we have to deal with that didn't have to be dealt with then, environmentally. And I'm not saying that's not a good issue. I'm just saying that we have these other concerns today that were concerns then, but they weren't

under any magnifying glass as they are today. Unfortunately, there's a segment of society today—there's always been a segment—that is critical in one fashion or another of government or your job or profession or occupation. And I look at it in mining as being an educational thing only. If mining were to educate their people and the general populace as to what they really do and how they do that

You're a perfect example of that. Would we have expected to have oral histories and real documentation of history thirty or forty years ago? Well, there isn't any. We're at the mercy of what we can find in the library, what was mainly reported in the local newspaper or in someone's book or an autobiography somewhere. But because of mining and these rules, then we inherently look at what the public's going to gain for this. This will be a tremendous resource for someone in what you record. And looking at that as a source of employment, too. Who would have ever thought that? For all of the bad things said about mining, there's no one that I know of that would ever want it any different than that.

Yes. And these were things that didn't, for example, exist when your father was a leaser at the Mary Mine?

No, absolutely not. Yet, they had to take care of them in their own fashion. It was a local issue. You didn't pollute your water source. You didn't destroy history just for the mine. You didn't tear a guy's house down. Yet, that's what people perceive today—that you're going to take this piece of property and destroy a piece of property. You don't do that today, and you didn't do it a hundred years ago. And even though we have this eminent domain law, Nevada history shows that that was never exercised for the mere chance to destroy one's property for a profit.

There was respect for each other and for history?

Absolutely. Courts have shown that. I just want it in perspective, as anyone else involved in mining would. But on the outside issue, I'm not a spokesman for mining, even though I have a job in mining and it has a function in my family, but we have our rules, and we have our respect.

Just through watching your dad, working with your dad as a kid, all the way to the position that you have now, you have seen a lot of the changes in technology. You were talking about a day when you said there were no rubber tires in the mine on the ore cars, for example. It was all on rail.

Oh, my golly. Right. Everything was rail. We pushed ore cars when I was a kid, and we loaded ore cars with shovels . . . and life progressed. We went on to what we called air tuggers. And, of course, in the deep shafts you had a hoist, in the winze and things. And then you went on to a larger operation, if you were fortunate. You had [model] Twelve B muckers, compressed-air-powered mucking machines.

Then in Nevada we saw this transition, which to me came about in the 1970s when I was first introduced to rubber-tire operations underground, where we made the hole larger so we could bring mechanized equipment in to do the work for you. That came about before then in many places. But I was one that stayed away from that mechanization, because I was accustomed to the same old methods of gravity ore chutes. We loaded them and let gravity fill the car for us, and all those things that we did with rail and rail cars and electric motors and air motors and all of those things. And the same with the drill.

And yet, as recently as your grandfather, miners were still dying in a very short time from miner's consumption.

Absolutely, absolutely. So that all came about within a hundred years here in this state.

Does anyone ever have miner's consumption now? You don't hear about it.

Well, that's a health issue that we monitor. Mary Goings is our industrial hygienist, that is our leader in doing our lab monitoring for industrial hygiene and silica . . . crystalline silica content of your rock and respiratory protection and dust.

And does she see it?

No, we don't, because the mining technology has taken people past that. Of course, it's monitored in the event that there's equipment failure. That's why we monitor that. I mean, if it were such a condition where people were being ordered to still work under those conditions . . . That's an impossibility today. You're going to be caught, and that will be suspended. That long-term health danger does not exist.

But we have all those other things that have come up, too. We have the cyanide issues, even though cyanide was around back then. We have the other environmental issues like chemical exposure from mercury and lead. So that's a part of our health program for safety.

Cyanide plants were fairly new, and when they were operating in Silver Peak, the tailings were just washed down the gullies onto the salt flats. That doesn't happen anymore?

Oh, no, it doesn't. And the top of the hill up there where you're talking about, there's just a lot of history at Mineral Ridge, Nevada.

There really is, in as far as the mining development goes. Not just because my family was involved, but because I know that. (I'll retrieve those records. I know where we can go to get some of those.) The Mary Mine was the leading gold producer in the 1930s. And it's ironic in comparison that here we are today with Nevada being the leading producer of gold in the U.S. and the third leading producer in the world. Our leading gold productions are in the Carlin Gold trends in east-central Nevada.

Yes, and Mineral Ridge Resources are going back into that old Mary Mine?

Here we go again, just as they did in the Carlin Gold Trend. We re-entered the Carlin Gold Trend in the mid-1960s to develop one of the world's largest resources. That's what we expected at Mineral Ridge. I don't know whether they have eliminated any future beyond an established point in time, and I don't know if that's something that they would publicly talk about. It's an unknown, and, of course, that's proprietary information for the company.

Whether the mining in that area can go on during the project's six or seven years and still be pulling gold out?

It's interesting to me that you ended up in a position where you're dealing with safety and training all the time, and your grandfather died of the silicosis.

That's been a very close issue for me when I do the safety classes. I use that issue when we talk about it, because it's an issue that I can reflect to directly—how it affected my family. My mom and her sister and my uncles were raised without a father because of a health issue involving crystalline silica dust in the mines.

And it even impacted you in that your mother was being conscientious about you as a child.

Absolutely. Absolutely. But I do have to put it in perspective—while that was a danger then and still is a danger today, the technology and the manner of enforcement has lessened the danger that another family would suffer the consequence that many, many families did. Our family wasn't alone. I mean, the graveyards in Nevada, as I tell the folks in our training sessions, is just One needs only to walk through the graveyards at Goldfield, Silver City, Virginia City, Tonopah, and the likes to see the number of miners who died in this occupation at very, very young ages.

Most maybe didn't live past thirty or forty?

Very young. Yes. And there were some mining districts more prone to that—Tonopah being one and Delamar in eastern Nevada. They had extremely high incidences of death by silicosis, dust consumption. In fact, this state created a benefits program for those families or miners who have suffered health effects in their occupation of silicosis.

Did your mother ever talk about how her family got along without their father?

Yes, she did. My grandmother had a garden and sold products right out of her garden. It was a large garden in Tonopah, my God, on top of the rock pile up there. That was an issue of its own. But she had goats and sold goat's milk and made goat's cheese. My Uncle Bill and my Uncle Dave both got jobs early on as kids, pumping gas, chauffeuring, driving haul trucks and cars—all those things that you do, that's what they did.

Everybody had to work and help out? And that's how they managed to feed and clothe and have a home for the kids?

Everybody, the whole family. Barter and trade and get a job.

Yes, it had a big impact, because there was not a main breadwinner at that point.

No, but there were many families that were in that same That's an unfortunate part of history.

Yes, so your mother grew up with friends that were probably in the same situation, which is part of why she was so strongly opposed to you being down in those mines?

Absolutely, absolutely. And, ironically, here's a case. When I mentioned the Del Papa family, what happened to Freddy when he passed away in 1967, because he had had breathing and respiratory problems for years. He was incapacitated for work.

When you said he couldn't walk, was that why, because he couldn't catch his breath? He couldn't breathe?

Absolutely. Yes. Throughout Nevada, through mining camp after mining camp I'm sure if we went to Virginia City, and we talked to people like my friend Mike Donovan, and we talked to the Gallagher family, you would find historically across the board in Nevada that was a part of life.

It's interesting, too, in terms of a project like this, in trying to get firsthand oral history information about what it was like down inside the Mary Mine. We almost entirely have to get it secondhand, because there are so few who are still alive, even from the 1930s. It's not only that they died of miner's consumption, but mining was hard work, and even after the silicosis was gone as a

health threat, it was still difficult for miners to live to old age. Not many of them did, a few.

Yes, like I can only tell you what dad and Fred and George and Jimmy Gavin and all of them would talk about. Another source would be Merle Swanson.

I have talked to Merle. In fact, he was in the Mary Mine in the 1930s, ran a crew underground, and we took him back down there so he could take a look at that area and remember where things were.

And, of course, Merle is getting up in age now.

Yes, he's one of the few that are left. Hefty Sanderson was down there with him . . .

Hefty, yes, but he's still in Hawthorne. All good friends with my dad. And, of course, Hefty later became sheriff of Mineral County, too. He and Dad, professionally, were sheriffs and were friends in that.

Thank you for your help today. Is there anything that we haven't covered that you wished to say about Silver Peak?

No, I simply wished that through the years I had recorded some of the things I was told. I know those roads. I've been on every one of them. I've hiked

I will tell you an old tale that more than one man spent his life looking for up on that hill, and that evolved from Pat Chiatovich, who is now dead, but you can talk to Judith Chiatovich [his wife]. John Brodie and Pat discovered a very rich gold ledge. I can truthfully tell you that we spent thirty years with Pat, Freddy, George Boscovich, Manhattan Dutch—all of us together, singly and collectively, but we could never find that gold again. Pat Chiatovich found it when he was employed by John Brodie, and

because of L208 and because of the lease structures then, he didn't announce it and didn't want it developed until it was a better [financial] climate. And then he never could find it again. He spent all of his life looking for it. Pat Chiatovich, he expended every bit of time he had, on off periods of time, with his family and friends, all looking for it. And he was hiking between the Brodie Mine and the Campenella property when he found it, in that small of an area. We looked all my life. That was a ritual similar to the sunken treasure thing, you know.

There was always that hope, knowing it's still there?

And, of course, it reached a point where we all . . . I say we, but I heard many conversations in later years where my dad and George and Freddy would tease Pat about, "You had a dream." But they knew that it was not a dream, because they participated in this same search. They had seen the ore. They had actually seen the ore that Pat had brought back, so it wasn't as if it didn't exist. It existed, and it still exists somewhere today.

Do you still look for it when you go?

I haven't. After my father passed away, I haven't, but up until then, yes.

That's part of that excitement of mining, that someday you'll strike it rich?

So there's a sadness in my thoughts, because I saw Pat live every day to do that, to try to find that again along with many, many of his friends. Well, he just didn't find it. And, obviously, in my mind I've chosen to think that if they ever make this large, rich discovery of gold at Mineral Ridge, that was Pat Chiatovich's.

It could still happen.

Yes, so I think that would be the closing chapter of this whole thing. And the Del Papa family and the gold in the washtub—Joselyn can actually give you detail as to how much was in that tub some thirty years after being picked at by thousands of people. So I witnessed that and saw that and worked for them in that mine looking to find more. It's been a nice hill for me.

ALLAN YOUNG

ALL MINING ENGINEERS dream of starting a mining and milling operation from the ground up, according to Allan Young. He grabbed that opportunity in the early 1980s when Sunshine Mining Company reopened the Sixteen-to-One silver mine outside of Silver Peak. Young's first impression of Silver Peak was less than favorable, but he found that the town grew on him, primarily because of the "real people" who lived there. Young describes innovations in technology, which were introduced to make the mine profitable in spite of plummeting silver prices. Sunshine boosted employment and helped Silver Peak's survival by improving the water system—one of its lasting contributions to the town.



ALLAN YOUNG: I was born in Wisconsin, southwest Wisconsin. I grew up in a little town called Westby and went to high school in Belmont, Wisconsin. I graduated from high school there in 1968, and then attended the University of Wisconsin, Platteville, which is also in that same area.

VICTORIA FORD: *And what was your major?*

Mining engineering.

So did you know right away when you went to college what you wanted to do?

Well, there were some last minute doubts, I guess. It was either geology or mining engineering, and I chose mining engineering. I just liked science and earth science, that type of thing. I was always interested in rocks. [laughter]

You probably had a great rock collection as a kid, huh?

Well, yes, I guess I did. [laughter]

When did you get your degree?

December 1972. It took about four and a half years to get through the program.

Did you get any training or job experience while you were going through school?

Yes, we were all encouraged to work in mines, to get jobs in mines during the summer, so I worked in Utah one summer at an underground mine near Bingham Canyon and then three summers in Colorado at an underground mine called the Idarado. After I graduated, I got a job at the Idarado Mine. That was out of Ouray, Colorado. It was a real interesting mine in a beautiful place, and I kind of just fell in love with it. Of course, those were the good old days in the mining business. We had lots of job offers when we got out of school, so it was just a matter of picking which one, and it was a foregone conclusion for me where I wanted to go to work. I went out there in January of 1973 and went to work as a mining engineer. I was there until the place closed down, essentially until 1978. I worked there as a senior mining engineer most of the time.

You said those were the good old days, 1972, when you graduated. Jobs were plentiful?

Yes, they were.

Has that changed?

Well, the business is cyclical. I think lately the situation is pretty good, but there for a while it was tight—a few years ago. But yes, back in those days you didn't have to go looking very long for a job. If you were a mining engineer, for instance, it was pretty easy to find one. You had lots of choices.

OK. Tell me about your connection to Nevada then?

Well, I went to work at the Idarado. I worked there for seven years or so, and then the place closed down for various reasons. I probably would still be there had it not closed down. I really enjoyed it there and got married while I was working there, so my

wife was from around there. At any rate, when the place closed down, we all went looking for work, and that was still a pretty good time, late 1970s. I had several options and had applied at the Sunshine Mine in Kellogg, Idaho, and they offered me a job. It looked pretty interesting, so I went to work up there as a senior mine engineer. I went up to Coeur d'Alene, moved my family to Coeur d'Alene, and I went to work there, became chief engineer.

A few months after I got there, I heard about this project that Sunshine had in Nevada called Sixteen-to-One. I got an opportunity to do a little work on it, a little ore-reserve work and some estimating, I guess you might say. So I was aware of it when I became chief engineer, but then that pretty well took up all of my time for a while.

The price of silver started coming up in the late-1970s. Mid to late 1979, the price of silver just started shooting up there, and there was some renewed interest, obviously, in Sixteen-to-One. Just about any silver property could make it with those prices. [laughter]

What were the prices then?

Oh, I'd have to look, but by the end of 1979 they were above twenty dollars, and they eventually (in early 1980, January, maybe February) were pushing almost fifty dollars there for a time.

Pretty dramatic increase.

Yes, incredible. I mean, just absolutely a real, real incredible jump. And, of course, during that same time if you remember, Carter was president, and inflation was pretty high—double digits. Interest rates were pushing 20 percent: they were really high. There was a lot of uncertainty in the economy. And then, of course, you had gold prices that were in the \$800 range. At the same time silver was up there, too. The

thing that really was driving the silver price was the attempt by the Hunts to corner the market.

When the price of silver started going up, everybody said, "Well, let's put Sixteen-to-One in operation." So they needed someone to do a plan and budget for the thing, basically, and I got picked and worked on that until . . . oh, I remember I was working on it in May when Mount Saint Helens [volcano in Mount Saint Helens National Volcanic Monument] went up, because I was at work that Monday. We finished the budget and plan and all that, I think it was in late May, early June, and then there was a June board of directors meeting. In March the silver price kind of crashed: it turned right around that quickly. In June I think the prices were still over twenty dollars an ounce, twenty-five maybe. They were still good, real good. And I think we assumed thirteen dollars an ounce or something, which at that time seemed pretty conservative, but history showed it wasn't. [laughter] At any rate, it was a slam-dunk as far as the board goes. They said, "Well, let's do this project."

I was offered the job as project manager, which means I had to move down there. Well, I jumped at the chance, because for every mining engineer one goal in life is to put a mine into production. Everybody wants to do that at least once in their career, and this was a good opportunity. I was resolved, when I got the chance, to do just that, so there was no question about it.

I had been down to Silver Peak a couple of times before. [laughter] I have to admit it—first impressions weren't real good. [laughter]

What were your first impressions?

Well, boy, after living in Coeur d'Alene and southwestern Colorado and . . .

Oh, you were in places that had a lot of trees and greenery.

Lots of trees. [laughter] And pulling into Silver Peak I got this impression that, oh boy, this place is the end of the world. [laughter] Frankly, it was kind of a depressing place at first, but first impressions, I think, for a lot of people are like that. It's a place that you have to give a chance to grow on you after a while.

Can you describe driving in there for the first time knowing you were going to live there?

Well, I've got to say that I thought that probably going through town with a D9 [Cat] with the blade down would probably be an improvement. [laughter] But, you know, that's just a first impression. It was the end of the road, and there weren't any trees around, and the place looked like it could use a good picking up, and it was just so much different from where I had come from. But nonetheless . . .

And it really is literally "the end of the road." It's the end of the blacktop.

Yes, it is. Nonetheless, it was a good opportunity, and I took the job. My wife didn't even see the place before we moved down there. I talked to her about it and then told her, "Look, it's a really terrible, terrible situation," and I kind of tried to prepare her for it. Well, she actually told me that I had overdone it a little bit. It wasn't as bad as I had told her. [laughter] I tell people that we moved in, we got there at night, and I kept the drapes drawn for a couple of days to get her used to it. [laughter]

We, of course, recognized early on that there wasn't any housing for anybody. We were looking at an employment of, oh, around a hundred people I think. There just wasn't any place for anyone to live.

Were you able to find housing for your own family?

Well, initially, the company had done some work down there before, and we had a couple of trailers that we owned in town. So when I first came there, when I'd come down there for a visit, we would stay in those trailers. We had kind of a watchman there as well that took care of things, so there was a bachelor place for six people or so—there was enough room in those trailers for like six guys.

At the same time, there wasn't any place in Tonopah either, because at that time . . . Well it was Anaconda, they were developing a big moly [molybdenum] mine near Tonopah, and there was a bit of a boom going on over there, too. So there just wasn't any place to live, and we knew we had to do something about that. Prior to the project actually being approved, we went around and bought up some property in town. We bought a big lot that would eventually become a trailer park. We bought some lots on the north end of town where we eventually put in some apartments and some two-bedroom family units and then some studio apartments and also some houses. We had bought a house down on the south end of town that we kind of converted into a bunkhouse or a boardinghouse. So we had bought up some land already, and then, when the project was approved, we went ahead and started building. We brought in four modular houses—that's where I lived when I brought my family down—and then we also built some apartments. We also started a program where we would purchase mobile homes and then lease them to our employees on a lease-option program, so after a period of time [they could buy]. It was a pretty sweetheart deal. I don't even think there was any interest [charged]. After a period of time, they would own them, and that was pretty popular. We did a lot of those.

So you really had to build your part of the town.

Yes, we had to provide our people with a decent place to live. The type of mine that we were putting in, especially because it was all mechanized, was going to require some pretty good technical people as well as skilled operators. We were going to ask a guy to get on a third-of-a-million-dollar piece of equipment. We definitely wanted to keep him happy and make sure that he was skilled and trained. [laughter] We wanted to keep our turnover down as much as possible, so we knew we had to provide these people with a good place to live. It's tough enough moving into a place like that: if you don't have decent housing, it's tougher yet.

When you came there, about how many people were in town?

I think there was somewhere around 250 maybe. Maybe a little more.

OK. And were there other facilities such as restaurants, grocery stores, gas stations?

Well, there wasn't actually. There wasn't a grocery store. You basically had to go to Tonopah to get a loaf of bread when I first moved there. And even at that, if you got in there on a Friday night after payday at the new moly mine, you might not even get a loaf of bread there. [laughter]

Sold out?

It was literally before they built Warehouse Market in Tonopah. They had Coleman's grocery store, and that was really the only grocery store. And when payday came there were 600 people out there at Nevada Moly, and if you'd get in there late, literally, the cupboards would be bare. The

food on the shelves would be pretty much gone. It was amazing.

So you turned around and went to Hawthorne then?

Well, usually what we did, and what most of the people in Silver Peak did, on the weekends they would take a couple of ice chests and go over to Bishop to do their grocery shopping. That was only 105 miles. Bishop is a nice town, and it was nice to get over there anyway and stock up for the week.

There was a kind of a bar in Silver Peak. It was called the Shifting Sands. It was Jim Gavin's place. He was still alive, but I don't think he was in town. I think he was in the hospital at the time we started up there. I had met him once, but that was during an earlier visit. You could get a sandwich in there, and there were a couple of booths: there wasn't much room. And then that was about it. I mean there just wasn't much there.

Could you buy gas in town?

Oh, you could get gas. Harvey Humphrey had a gas pump in town there, and you had to go get him, and he would pump gas for you. Now, of course, if you worked for Foote [Mineral Company], I guess they had gas pumps that they would use. I don't know if they sold it to their employees or not. But other than that, the only gas was Harvey's pump.

Tell me a little bit about the welcome you received, both from the community and from the other major employers in town. Start with the community, will you? Were you greeted by the old-timers, the people who have lived there for a while? Were you welcomed?

Well, a lot of the old-timers were miners anyway, so I think they always like to see mines go in. But on the other hand, they were a little apprehensive of what such a big development would do to the town. They lived there because they liked it the way it was, so there was probably a little apprehension. I know Harvey told me one time (I forget his exact words) that there was a lot of concern as to what Sunshine was going to do to their little town. But I think overall I felt welcome.

Did you hold any community meetings to talk about the project?

Yes, we did. In July of 1980, I came down to Silver Peak. This was just before I moved down there to stay. This was, oh, maybe, three or four weeks before that. I came down with Viet Howard, who at that time was the chief operating officer of the company. We held a little town meeting and went over what we were going to do. There were a lot of questions. I think most people wanted to know what we were going to be paying and what kind of jobs would be available, but there was also concern about the lake, Silver Lake. It's above town and just below the mine, and at that time it was being fed by the mine, so there was a lot of concern about that and rightfully so.

Explain that a little bit more. It was being used for what when you arrived?

Well, the thing had sort of been put in over the weekend one time. [laughter] There had always been a spring up there, and then when a previous company had driven a tunnel into the mountain, they had intersected some more water, and that allowed the water to flow clear down to the valley. Someone got the idea that, "Gee, we dam this up, and we could make a nice little pond here and stock it with fish." Good idea.

I guess they went through all the proper channels to request that. I wasn't there at the time. But for whatever reason, it got tangled up in bureaucratic red tape, and so finally one weekend someone went up there and just put it in. [laughter] There it was. "Now what are you going to do about it?" And then after that, they got the fish and game [Nevada Division of Wildlife] to start stocking it with trout. It was a real nice place. We didn't want to disrupt that. The water was pretty good quality, so it was just a matter of getting the suspended solids, the particles of dirt and so on, out of the water before it went down there. We put in some settling ponds to do that. It took us a while to really get the water cleaned up. It was dirty for a while, although I think it was within our discharge limits. It was still kind of cloudy, and we finally hit on a solution to that. When we finally got our permanent pumps in down below the mine, the water cleaned up pretty well and fish continued to thrive in there. In fact, that's where I took my kids when they got old enough to fish. That was the first place I took them.

I was going to ask you if you had children when you arrived in town.

I had one son. He was a year and a half, and then we had a second son while I was there, in 1981.

Let's go back to the concerns from the town's residents. So they were interested in jobs available. They were concerned about Silver Lake remaining as a recreation area for them.

This was going back a ways, but I think water was another concern, too, because at that time the water quality in town wasn't that good. Their system there was just not adequate, so a lot of times the water would just go off. One of the first things we did when we came in there was hire an engineer

to do a study on the water system, to recommend an upgrade and what needed to be done to not only provide the current needs but also the future needs of the town. He did that, and then I think he worked with one of the government agencies to help secure a grant to upgrade the system. The bottom line is, eventually, we got a new water system in town—larger diameter pipes, and plastic lines, and a proper pumping system. After that, for the most part, water problems were gone. That pretty well took care of it.

We had another problem. Originally, when I came to town, the pipeline coming in from the well was asphalt-coated pipe, and that asphalt was apparently coming off. A lot of times you'd be taking a shower when you'd get this black greasy stuff on you. [laughter] It was kind of nasty. So, definitely, that was a big priority.

So this water system when you arrived was old pipes with asphalt coating, and what was used for the pump?

Well, they had an irrigation-type pump. I remember going in the pump house one time, and they had this thing rigged up where they had this . . . I don't know whether it was vegetable oil or something dripping into this thing for lubrication. They couldn't use petroleum-based oil, because it was a domestic or potable water source. The pump would overheat a lot, so they took a rag and stuck it over the pump motor, and they had water running on it. I mean, if you touched anything in there, you're apt to get electrocuted. [laughter] It was pretty scary.

[laughter] The definition of jerry-rigged it sounds like.

That's exactly it. It was jerry-rigged. They didn't have any money. I guess the guy that was running it, that's all he could do to

keep the water going. They just didn't have any funds to do anything.

Essentially, Sunshine (your company) worked with the local government agencies to get that water system replaced. Is that correct?

Yes. Well, first of all we hired an engineering company from Bishop. Fred Finkbinder was his name. He was a civil engineer. I think he worked for the L.A. water district. Anyway, we had him come in and do an assessment of what needed to be done. He did some engineering work, and he was able to get some . . . I think it was federal funds. I know we got some funds from outside to upgrade the system, and that was a big plus, definitely.

Allan, could you talk about starting the operation at the Sixteen-to-One Mine?

Well, the plan was to develop the mine from two different directions. First of all, as an underground mine, the idea was that we would begin work on the 7,000-level tunnel, which was driven back in the 1960s by Mid-Continent Uranium. We were to go in there and widen that tunnel out, and then in the back end of the mine drive ramps downward. That was our part of it.

Then we brought in a contractor, American Mine Services, to start a ramp—a long decline from about 175 feet below the 7,000-level adit. We brought them in to drive a long decline, and then at the bottom of that decline, they were to start ramping up to meet us. That was the plan.

You mentioned some of the equipment that you brought in. Can you list those?

The first thing we did, we went out and purchased a 950 loader and a D6 Cat. That was what we needed to just barely get started. We put in a kind of a yard—not

really a warehouse but just a storage yard down where the mill eventually was developed.

Also down there at the location of the mill, we put in a temporary trailer park. I think that's where some of the miners for American Mine Services lived. When they started out, they lived down at the boardinghouse down in town. Anyway, it was tough initially, because of the shortage of places to live. Most of the people that came in were doing it on a bachelor basis. Eventually, our own people brought their families in, but it started out as pretty much a bachelor camp.

I guess by mid-September or late September, we were pretty well rolling. We had everything we needed there to get started. We just had a handful of people, and the contractor didn't have a lot either. He was just driving a single heading, single-tunnel phase, three shifts a day, seven days a week, basically.

About how many people were employed at the time that you started?

I suppose at that time, early on, there was a total with the contractors and Sunshine, maybe twenty or thirty people—in there somewhere. Just a guess.

Things went along pretty well until we started to hit water down in the lower tunnel, and by January of 1981 it was becoming a rather serious problem. There was a lot of water being pumped out. We didn't expect to hit that much water, and every round seemed like we got into more and more. As a result, that ended up costing us a little more to drive the tunnel and also slowed us down a bit on the schedule, but we got through it. What happened was, when we intersected all those water bearing structures . . . Of course, the upper water-course there was actually a spring in the mine. It dried up, because we intersected it down below. But we had much more water

down below, so we would pump that up to our water tanks for use. Then the drill water and that type of thing and the excess would go to the lake through the settling ponds.

Did you have to make any innovations to deal with the water other than the pumping?

Just bought lots of pumps. [laughter] It was really tough for a while, because we didn't really have a good settling system and really didn't have a sump, and we had a pretty high head, so it was difficult pumping. And then, of course, there were a lot of fines being created by the equipment we were running, so it was difficult for a while. It was a real struggle. Once we got to the bottom of the mine and developed the sumps and put in permanent pumping installations, we were able to settle the water much better. After that, it was not nearly as much a problem as it had been.

We got into the vein down low, at the bottom of the mine, and the idea was we weren't going to start construction of the mill until we were sure that the ore was down there as we had expected. We intersected it down low, and the grade was what we had anticipated, and it was good width. So about April of 1981 we began construction of the mill.

Can you explain the mill? Tell me what type of process and what you did.

Yes. This was a silver and gold property. We had done, of course, some metallurgical test work on the ore back in, oh, I guess, 1979, and had determined that the ore would respond well to cyanidation, which was the most common method of recovering silver and gold from ores, especially from Nevada. We set about to design a flow sheet, and we hired an engineering firm in Salt Lake called Industrial Design Corporation, and they designed a plant for us. And while

we were driving the tunnel and doing the mine development work, we were doing mill engineering as well. So by the time we got to the main, we pretty well had the mill designed. We were ready to go as soon as we had reasonable confirmation of the ore quality down there.

Once we had exposed the vein down at the bottom of the mine, we commenced construction of the mill. Now the mill . . . basically, it was a pretty standard flow sheet—not much different than the way they did it seventy, eighty years ago. It was pretty conventional.

I was going to ask you if you had a chance to visit the remains of the old E.L. Cord Mill while you were there?

Oh, lots of times. I think that was a cyanidation mill as well.

Right. I was wondering if what you built was a similar process.

It was different. Of course, back in those days you didn't have the kinds of pumps that you have today, and so one had to design around that. And it was a much smaller mill, too. Ours was about 550 tons a day and basically consisted of crushing and grinding the ore to sand-sized particles and adding cyanide. We had to use a fairly strong solution, because the silver minerals require a higher concentration of cyanide than gold, usually. And then leaching . . . we had five different vats, one right after the other, where we got about a twenty-four-hour retention time, something like that. And after that it would go through a series of thickeners, which would basically wash the slurry (the sand particles) and wash the cyanide solution from those particles. Then we had a tailing stand down below there that was all lined. All our tailings were discharged to that. Then we used a Merrill-Crowe precipitation, which uses zinc dust to

precipitate the silver and gold out of the solutions. We had a little smelting room, where we had a little furnace and actually produced gold and silver bullion right there on-site.

We had originally planned to start the mill up in February of 1982, and we hit that right on the money. We were projecting our first shipment of metal by April 1, and we hit that one right on the money, too.

After the gold and silver was melted and made into bullion there, where was it shipped?

We shipped it to our operations in Kellogg, Idaho. At that same time, we were building a silver refinery up there. We had electrolytic refining capabilities there, and that was basically the first feed for that.

Originally, we started by smelting (casting anodes) for that, and then that became just too much of a problem for us to do down there. We just didn't have the equipment for it. So then we just produced the ingots—the round, conical shaped ingots—and shipped those up there. They recast them and produced .9999 pure silver and gold.

When I was talking to Don Earnest, he mentioned two processes that maybe you would like to talk about—the belt-press filter and the modified vertical crater retreat.

Yes, we had a couple of things, I guess, that were somewhat unique. The mining system that we had originally proposed for the Sixteen-to-One was a long-hole stoping method, long-hole blasting. It is a method used at other mines as well—several mines in Canada, I know, and there was one in Utah called Escalanti that was using that very same method. We started off using that method and found out that it required leaving a lot of ground open for a period of

time. We started to get a lot of dilution, and that was one of our big problems right at first. The ore grade wasn't what we had hoped for, one of the reasons being because of the dilution that we were getting.

So we changed our mining system in 1984, some time after we started up. We went to a modified vertical crater retreat. Basically, rather than shoot off entire lengths of ore off the end of these sublevels—rather than taking vertical slices of ore, in other words—we would take horizontal slices of ore by lowering charges down these blast holes and shooting a little bit at a time rather than the whole thing. And as we did that, the broken ore would fill up the void below, so it would kind of support the walls. We would just bring this up, slice by slice, until we got to the level, and then we'd go to the next level. And as it turned out, it had quite a remarkable benefit to our dilution. It cut our dilution from 30 percent to like 7 percent—it was a dramatic change. So that's the way we continued the mining operation from then on out. You always hate to have to change your mining system in the middle of a project, but . . .

Why do you hate to change?

Well, you buy your equipment to fit the mining system, and you do all your development to fit a particular mining system. Then, if you've got a change, it sometimes creates a problem.

You have to buy new equipment?

Yes, wrong equipment, wrong development. It's not that easy, but in this case it wasn't a big deal. Obviously, we had to change the scheduling and the sequencing of how we mined out stope blocks, but it wasn't a big problem for us. Productivity wasn't quite as good as the previous method, but the gains in dilution more than offset that.

Was this a system that you had seen used in the United States before?

Vertical crater retreat mining was used in other places, yes. I was aware of it from articles that I had read about mines in Canada, for instance, that were using it, so it wasn't a unique approach by any means. There weren't a lot of mines using it, but certainly for us it was the way to go.

What about the belt-press filter?

Well, one of the things that we found, one of our big cost elements at the mill, was that cyanide costs were very high, and our consumption was high relative to other mines. And tailings disposal costs were high. Back in 1984, we started looking at ways that we could reduce that cost, and we found out that a lot of the cyanide that we were losing was actually just being held up, you might say, in the moisture content of the tailings that were going out to the pond. We just weren't getting it all back. We were only getting a portion of it back by pumping it back. So we decided, if we could send our tailings out there a lot drier, we're going to do a couple of things—we're going to get more solution back to the mill first of all, and we're also going to eliminate the need to keep raising the dam every year or so, which was costly; and the third benefit is that we were not going to have that big pond of water that we had to be worried about birds landing in all the time. So there were some benefits there.

We looked around at filters, and we finally came up with a filter built by Elmco. It's called a belt-press filter, and it had been used in the coal mines quite a bit for dewatering, but it hadn't (to our knowledge) ever been used in the application that we were going to use it in, and that's hard-rock tailings filtration. We decided to go ahead and do it anyway, and we put it in.

We had some start-up problems in selecting the right types of filter belts and how we distributed the slurry. We had the usual start-up problems, but in the end it turned out to be a real benefit for us. We were able to cut our cyanide consumption by more than half, and our tailing disposal costs basically disappeared. So it turned out to be a successful project for us—cut our costs significantly.

Were there any other changes or innovations like that required by this project?

Not really. Those were the two that really come to mind. Our biggest problem was that Silver Peak was not a moneymaker for us, unfortunately. Probably the biggest problem was the price of silver. When the project was authorized in June of 1980, I think, silver was twenty to twenty-five dollars an ounce. Two months after it started up in 1982, silver dropped to four dollars and eighty-five cents.

So thirteen dollars had not been a conservative estimate. What a difference!

Yes, needless to say, we hit it right at their low time as far as the silver price goes. But we had some disappointments in ore-reserve grade as well. That was just part of the business. Our capital costs were higher than what we had originally anticipated for various reasons. So in the end, it didn't turn out to be a successful mine, although we had a couple of good years: 1983 was a pretty good year; 1985, we made silver for less than five dollars an ounce. That was a pretty good year, but overall it wasn't a successful project.

It would have helped if the price of silver had stayed up?

Had the price stayed up that would have solved all the other problems right there. [laughter]

Because the mine was good?

Yes. You know, we got our problems straightened out. We were producing a thousand tons a day with twenty-five people. That's real good productivity. That's a good productivity no matter where you go. And the mill operated with basically two people and a mechanic, so we didn't have a lot of people. I think our productivity was pretty good, really, considering what our tonnage was and that type of thing. It's just . . . the price was low during most of the time we operated, and that really hurt.

Now, you left before the operation closed down. Is that correct?

Yes. We had a pretty good year in 1985. The first part of 1986 our grades started to go down, and that was mainly just due to . . . we were in lower-grade sections. It didn't look like it was going to come up again. In 1984 and 1985, we had pretty much mined out the best areas, and the price of silver wasn't very good. June of 1986, the management of the company made the decision just to shut the Sixteen-to-One Mine down, so we shut the mine down in June of 1986.

At the same time, we were doing some exploration work at a mine north of Silver Peak called Weepah. We had done some drilling there and had gotten some interesting results. What they decided to do is, "Let's put Weepah into production, and we'll run the Weepah ore through the mill." We hired a contractor, Lost Dutchman Construction out of Reno, to do the mining out there for us. It was an open pit. So we mined the ore at Weepah and ran it through the mill. Unfortunately, we were premature in making that development decision. We

should have done some more drilling, because the grade didn't turn out to be what we had hoped, and the ore body was more variable than we had anticipated. At any rate, we ran it through the mill. Didn't really make much on it. That lasted until, I guess, early 1987.

I really enjoyed Silver Peak. I really have a soft spot in my heart for Silver Peak. I liked the people, and after I was there for a while, the place kind of grew on me. I really enjoyed it, and I enjoyed my work and everything else, and I really hated to leave. But by early 1987, my wife and kids had been there for six years or so and, we just kind of thought it was time to go somewhere else. It was looking like we were going to be shutting the mill down and kind of mothballing everything for a while. I wasn't really crazy about that. Frankly, it was kind of sad to see it happen, so I was ready for a change. March or April of 1987, I took a job with Echo Bay Mines in Colorado, where I was kind of in the same area I started my career, and so I left Silver Peak in May. I think the first part of May was my last day at the mine, and I moved my family in June. So that was the end of it for me.

Now after that Don Earnest took over. Later on that year, they put in a heap-leach operation, which I think was successful. A lot of the low grade that was created at Weepah was stockpiled out there, and then they crushed it and hauled that to the mill, crushed it, and then heap leached it, and I think that turned out to be a good project. But it didn't last forever either.

Tell me what was it about Silver Peak that changed your mind during that time you were there.

I guess the people were real friendly, and my wife and I probably had more friends there than we've had anywhere we ever lived. Our first impressions, because it's such a stark landscape, and the place kind of

looks a little run down Most people don't get a real good impression when they first go there. I think that's probably a given. But you just have to give it a little time, and it kind of grows on you. It did me anyway, and I really liked it. I loved the job, and, heck, that's a big part of it. And on the weekends I'd go up in the hills with the kids, and I really enjoyed that. We'd go places on the weekends. I put a lot of miles on my car when we were there. It's just a real friendly place. I like small towns anyway, and it had a ruggedness about it. There were all real people who lived there. [laughter] They were tough, and it was just a refreshing place to live, I guess. I liked it.

I like your story about Silver Lake—how they got tired of the government red tape, and they just put it in. It reminds me of the story when red tape required that their school be outside of the city limits, and one night everybody just decided they had enough of transporting the kids, so they moved the school into town. [laughter] That's kind of the atmosphere in that town?

Yes, yes. It is. It's pretty independent. I guess that's what I liked the most about it, the independence of everybody. I'm sort of that way myself. I really like that. The only thing I never did get quite used to is the wind. The darned wind would always blow. [laughter] And you would go away for the weekend and come back, and your trash cans might be in the next county. You never knew. [laughter] The wind never stopped blowing, seems like. [laughter]

You're talking about a strong wind, too. [laughter]

[laughter] That's just typical though for Nevada. I guess it's pretty much that way all over. And then, of course, when the wind would blow hard, you'd get these dust storms that were really something to see.

Yes, I drove out of Silver Peak one day where the salt flats were kind of up in the air—couldn't see a quarter of a mile in front of me.

Yes. [laughter] That's something I could live without. But other than that, I enjoyed it. In fact, I have gone back a number of times. I was just back there in March. I had my younger son with me. We were doing a little prospecting, a little rock hounding, and we stayed there at the apartments. It was kind of nice.

Got to see everybody again?

Yes, yes. That's right.

Did you stop and see Ruby and Griff?

I didn't see them. No, I didn't. I did see Elton [Parsons]. I saw Alberta Merritt. I ran into her. I didn't get a chance to see Ruby though. I don't think she was in town.

Well, is there anything else that we should know about that time in the 1980s in Silver Peak when you were there?

Well, bringing in another hundred people or so created problems for a while, especially with the construction crews, but it also improved things. With that many more people, the town was able to support a small grocery store and a good restaurant. Hefty Sanderson and Alice came in, and they built up and turned the Shifting Sands into the Miner's Inn, and it became really a nice place. The food was great—nice little restaurant and bar there. And then there were a couple of other places. The Dead Coon Saloon sprang up. That was just below our place. And for a while, you could even rent videos in Silver Peak. [laughter] Almost didn't have to leave, so it helped bring some services in that maybe wouldn't have been there otherwise.

Those are pretty dramatic changes for that little town, too.

Yes, it was nice to be able to not have to drive fifty miles to get a gallon of milk—definitely an improvement. During the construction period of the mill, we had some pretty rough characters in there. That didn't sit very well with a lot of people. Fortunately, that was short lived.

But that was strictly the construction workers?

Yes, pretty much the construction crews and the welders and the steel workers and those kinds of guys. A pretty rough-and-tumble bunch. [laughter] They liked to party, and they got pretty wild around there from time to time.

DON EARNEST

*D*ON EARNEST was employed by Sunshine Mining Company and worked at the Sixteen-to-One mine outside of Silver Peak in the 1980s. By comparing his oral history interview with others, the changes in mining and milling technology over a fifty-year period from the 1930s become apparent. On the other hand, the bond between miners was as strong as ever—a bond between dependable comrades forged by facing daily danger as illustrated at the death of Mine Superintendent Phil Lapp by the tribute of fellow miners. In addition, Earnest described the impact a mining company can make on a small Nevada mining town, both positive and negative, and how he came to respect Silver Peak’s “cast of characters.”



VICTORIA FORD: Today is September 19, 1996, and I will be doing a telephone interview with Don Earnest of Tucson, Arizona. We will be talking about Silver Peak. Would you give me your date of birth and where you were born, please?

DON EARNEST: July 27, 1951, Akron, Ohio.

What is your connection to Nevada?

Well, the family originally is from the West—Colorado. In fact, I missed being born in Pueblo, Colorado, by about four weeks. My father was a corporate pilot. He got a job flying for B. F. Goodrich out of Akron, so we moved back there. The family ties to the West have always been strong, and I didn’t like growing up in Ohio. As soon as I graduated from college, I left there and went to work in the mining industry.

Where did you start?

I started with Newmont at the Idarado Mining Company in Ouray, Colorado. I was an underground-mine geologist. That was the first job in mining I had, and I worked there from 1973 to the end of 1975.

Did you have a college education in geology?

Right, bachelor’s of science in geology from Ohio State University. From Colorado

I went to Park City, Utah, for Anaconda working at the Ontario mine, also an underground mine. And I worked there until January of 1978 when the mine closed down. After that I transferred with Anaconda down to Grants, New Mexico, and worked there for approximately a year and a half at the Jackpile Mine on the Laguna Indian reservation. That was a uranium mine, both underground and open pit.

So was that your first experience with open pit?

That was, yes. I was senior mine geologist at Grants. From New Mexico, we moved to San Francisco, California, and at that time, I was actually working for Pincock, Allen, and Holt, a mining-engineering consulting company which was based in Tucson. I lived in San Francisco because my wife had gotten a job with Fluor Mining and Metals up there in the Bay Area.

So now it's a family affair. You're both working in mining.

Yes, and it's been that way from the start. My wife's a computer programmer, so she's worked for virtually every mining company that I've worked for, except Sunshine Mine and a couple of others.

Well, that's a nice combination, because often that's not the case. The husband and wife may be in different industries, and moving for mining can be a little difficult.

That's right. We've been extremely fortunate that most of the places we've lived she's been able to do something related to computers, even if it wasn't geology or mining related. A good example was in Ouray, Colorado. She also worked for Newmont there at the Idarado Mine, but almost all of her computer work was payroll, warehouse inventory, that sort of thing—

not the things she liked to do, but it was better than cleaning tables down in one of the cafes in town.

Which is sometimes the only option, right?

That's true. Small towns . . . there's not a whole lot, or at least back in the early 1970s, there wasn't a whole lot for women to do. A little different today maybe . . .

Because mining is often out in the small towns, so that's all that's available.

Yes, it's almost always in the small towns.

When did you first come to Nevada?

Well, I went to Nevada from Butte, Montana. I returned to the Anaconda Company from San Francisco. We lived there a year and put up with both of us being out of town almost all the time. In fact, a couple of times we passed at the San Francisco airport. That obviously wasn't going to work out long-term.

We both went back with Anaconda in Butte and stayed there a little over a year and weren't really satisfied with the way things were run at Butte. We were kind of outsiders: we weren't born and raised in Butte. Butte's an old mining camp, or at least at that time it was, and it was pretty much populated by people who were born and raised there, went to Montana Tech, got their degrees in engineering, whatnot, and there just weren't a lot of outsiders or people who'd worked elsewhere that went to work at Butte. So we didn't like that situation.

I guess it would be in 1981, Allan Young called me. He was at Sunshine at that time, and Allan and I had worked together at the Idarado Mine back in Ouray. That was also his first job out of college. He just called up out of the blue one day and said that they were putting in this mine down in Silver

Peak, Nevada—Sunshine was, and it was going to be an underground silver mine. He was going to be the manager of it, and did I know anybody who would be interested in being the chief geologist. And I said, “Yes, you’re talking to him.”

So that was the answer to the travel problems.

Yes, and it turned out Anaconda was also developing a mine at the very same time in Tonopah, a big open-pit molybdenum project. My wife was able to transfer down to that operation and do exactly what she wanted to do.

I want to stop just a second and talk about an issue that you brought up. You were mentioning feeling like outsiders in Butte, Montana, because it was an old mining camp. Did you run into that anywhere else along the way?

Not really.

That was the first and only time?

Yes, that was the only time. I should say there’s one other time that I turned down a job, because I knew that a similar situation existed, and that was up in the Silver Valley in Idaho where Sunshine had the Sunshine Mine, which had been running for over a hundred years continuously. And when I was with Sunshine in Silver Peak, towards the end of my stay there, the company wanted me to transfer up to Kellogg, Idaho, and manage the mine there. I didn’t do it, and the chief reason was that it was another situation exactly like Butte. The people who worked there, technical people—the mine superintendents and certainly all the miners—they were all Silver Valley natives, and I knew I was going to be the guy from the outside, and that was going to be a tremendous disadvantage to try and put

through some of the changes that the company recognized needed to be made. I only ran into that in those two places and only worked with it in Butte. I can’t say that all camps are like that. Certainly, the others that I worked in were not like that. Park City wasn’t. The area around Ouray, when I worked there at Idarado, had three major mines operating at the time, and I certainly didn’t have that feeling there.

And you didn’t run into that at Silver Peak or around the Tonopah area?

No, not at all.

Because those are old mining areas, too.

That’s true. Silver Peak, as well as Tonopah, had their locals or their natives who’d been there all their lives, and anybody who spends their life in that country—born and raised there—is a certain breed of cat, so to speak. But they did not seem to mind at all the fact that here’s these outsiders or non-natives coming in, living and working and in a lot of cases supervising them.

Were you just tolerated, or were you welcomed, do you think?

I think we were welcomed for the most part. I mean, there were certain individuals that weren’t glad to see us there under any circumstances, whether we were from Nevada or not, but no, for the most part we were accepted. I never felt out of place there.

When you say people around that area of Nevada are a certain breed of cat, how would you describe that?

Tonopah, Silver Peak, Gabbs, places like that are not exactly the garden spot of the universe. But at the same time, in their own

right, they're very beautiful places. Silver Peak, for example, is not a place that I would want to spend my life, but I certainly enjoyed the time that I spent there. Yet, to *spend* your life there, I think, they are a certain type of individual to be able to do that.

Those who can adjust to an area that's very stark and wide open and empty? I can't recall any green lawns there, for example.

Well, we had a few there at the company houses when Sunshine was in town. However, the postmistress, Ruby [Griffin], she always had a nice lawn and flower beds. But you're right, it was an exception.

Right. She still has a nice yard, but I don't think there's much of a lawn there right now.

I think she's passed away.

Actually, she hasn't. Ruby Griffin has retired from the post office, but she's alive and active.

Really? Great, because I'd been told she passed away. She is a delight. She's certainly an example of a person that accepted all of us.

So when Allan Young called you, he was working for the Sunshine Mining Company? And they had an underground silver mine that they were starting in 1981?

That's right. They were starting to develop it and construct the mill. The mine was just about four and a half miles due west of Silver Peak, up in the Silver Peak Range. It was just past the old ghost town of Nivloc. The mill was closer to town. The mill was about, oh, two and a half miles from town, I'd say.

My job initially was as chief geologist. I was responsible for all the geologic happenings at the mine and also all district exploration, which was defined as just about anything within truck-haulage distance of the mill.

OK. Can you give a little bit more detail about what that meant day-to-day, those two responsibilities?

Well, initially, the major responsibility at the Sixteen-to-One Mine during development was to make sure that the miners stayed on the vein, that the vein was intersected where we anticipated it, and to map the geology and to do underground sampling for comparison to what the calculations had been, which had been based on the drill holes.

Did you find anything unique or different in the work here?

The geology was, in some cases, very much simpler than some of the places I had worked—for example, Park City where the geology is tremendously complex. It wasn't nearly so complex at Silver Peak. But at the same time, there were enough things going on geologically that there was a lot of work to do from the standpoint of making sure good geologic maps were prepared that we could then use to make projections about places where we could find other ore.

And when you say the geology was simpler, translate that into layman's terms. Easier to follow the vein or . . . ?

Easier to follow the vein, much less structural disruption. . . .

All right. Structural disruption meaning?

Meaning that, after the vein was deposited, it was not faulted off in a bunch of

places or overturned or folded or things like that. It was pretty much in there as a tabular feature, like a book standing on its edge, and had very little disruption to it, so it was not hard to follow. But the challenge there was to determine where, along the vein or along the main Sixteen-to-One structure, you could find ore, because even though the vein existed, there wasn't always mineralization.

I see. And that's where it was important to get the mapping right? To find out exactly where the work should be done?

That's correct.

OK. And then you said exploration in the district. What did that involve?

Well, usually around a cluster of mines in the West, the term "district" is applied. For example, the Butte District includes pretty much all of the mines around Butte, Montana, within, say, a radius of ten miles, something like that. You'd always hear of mining camps spoken of as districts—the Eureka District in Nevada up around the town of Eureka.

Well, the Silver Peak District roughly extended from up in that area of Mineral Ridge, up there where the old Mary and Drinkwater mines were and the Oromonte (the place where Mineral Ridge Mining is now working), to the west over through the Nivloc Mine, which was the first really extensive underground silver producer in that area. It encompassed the mines on the other side of the ridge from the Sixteen-to-One, the Mohawk, the Sanger, and some of those. Those were collectively referred to as the Silver Peak District. So from an exploration standpoint, I was responsible for not only right around the Sixteen-to-One mine, but also for exploring ground that Sunshine didn't own or control that was not

only in that general geographic area but also extended beyond.

I mentioned that we defined it as being "anything within truck haulage of the mill." And the reason for that was that early on in the project, we did do some ore purchasing, where someone who had a small mine out in the general area (sometimes as far as a hundred miles away) could ship us ore, and we would purchase it and then mill it at our mill there.

I see. And that's part of making a mill efficient in terms of operation?

Well, no, that's an unusual thing. That's something that's rarely done in the West anymore. The main reason is that once you start mixing other folks' ore in with your own, then you create a problem of accountability of your product. You've got to have a real good idea of the tonnage and grade of material that you're putting through that's foreign to your operation, so you can make sure that you adequately determine what the metal content of that material was by itself, so you can keep track of what you're actually producing out of the mine that the mill was constructed for. So it's a bit of a headache, and hardly any companies ever do it. But we did it there for two reasons: one, we thought we could make money doing it; and, secondly, it's a common problem everywhere in the West now that the little guys who are mining a few hundred tons a month or something like that don't have any place to process their ore.

Was this something that was done more frequently in the past?

Yes, back at the turn of the century each district usually had one or two mills that were standalone mills: they didn't have any mines connected with them. They served as sort of the general plant that a lot of small

operations could send their ore to. Sometimes they're referred to as custom mills or toll mills. But here in the past twenty, thirty years in this country, those types of operations have pretty much died out. I'm not aware of any that exist right now, other than one in Silverton, Colorado, that's just cranking up. So it's something that's disappeared from the mining scene but that's always been very important to the small miners or the mom-and-pop operations, a couple or three guys out there working a claim.

Do you know how the decision was made to do that at Silver Peak then, since it was obviously a thing that was on its way out?

Sure. At the mill in Silver Peak, we had excess crushing capacity. The crushing circuit in the mill was approximately 40 percent larger than what our through-put out of the mine was, so there's times when the crusher just sat there and didn't operate. Allan started looking at it from the standpoint of, "Gee, we could utilize the equipment much better if we were putting material through it, and maybe we ought to start looking at doing some outside ore." And, you know, this is the sort of thing that hatched over the coffee cups, around the light table, back in the engineering office one morning.

Initially, we thought of things like, "Well, let's just take it on consignment. We mill it, and then based on what comes out of it, we pay the owners of the ore something or just charge them a flat fee per ton." And we kicked around lots of options but finally decided the best one for us, and certainly the best one for the ore sellers, was to just buy it. They would be responsible for delivering it to the mill site, at which time we brought it through the crusher and thoroughly sampled it and, based upon those samples, determined a dollar value for the ore that also had our costs and recovery

considerations figured out. Then we took a percentage of that as our profit for doing it and returned what was left over to the seller.

Were there other advantages for doing this, other than to fill the excess crushing capacity?

Well, that and to make a small operating profit on it. It was never a thing that we made a tremendous amount of money on by any stretch.

Do you think it was worth doing?

Yes, certainly do. And again, it's something that creates problems, in that you're not only worried about your own ore that you're milling, but you've got these other guys that you've got to make sure don't cause any peculiar problems to the circuit that would cause recoveries to go down when you mixed it up with your own ore, that sort of thing. So it's not something that was particularly easy, but something we felt was worthwhile in doing.

Earlier when we talked, you said that there were some things that were done in Silver Peak that were new innovations or adaptations to the area. Could you discuss a few of the things that you saw there that were different?

Yes, chiefly it was in the plant or in the mill. We put in what was called a belt-press filter to de-water, take most of the moisture out of the tailings down at the tailings pond. See, normally tailings are sent down to a tailings pond. They're mixed with water as a slurry—that's the way they're transported down in the tailings pipe or the tailings line. And then they're discharged out into a broad tailings pond, which is a pond that's created by the tailings dam. The problem with doing it that way is, there's a tremendous amount of water that's dumped

into the pond, and in places like Silver Peak, where we had to pump our water out of a well, we started looking at ways that we could return some of that water to the mill and use it again. Also, dissolved in the water, of course, was some residual cyanide from the milling operation, and the cyanide concentrations that we used at the Silver Peak mill were quite high. They were on the order of seven to eight pounds per ton of ore.

And what's the usual?

Oh, the usual on some of the low-grade Nevada gold deposits are more on the order of one to two.

Why were the concentrations so high there?

We had a higher grade of ore from the standpoint of ounces per ton of silver. The grade of our ore in the mill was somewhere between six to seven ounces per ton. A typical low-grade gold plant in Nevada now might have a .05 to .1 ounces per ton of gold. Well, it's a lot less material you're trying to dissolve with cyanide. The .1 to 10 ounces per ton is a factor of a hundred. We were a factor of approximately sixty to seventy at Silver Peak over a normal gold operation, so it required more cyanide to dissolve the metal. There's more of it there.

So, it's good news in that there's a higher concentration in the ore there, but it's a challenge then to deal with the higher levels of cyanide.

That's right. Keep in mind though, most of what we were shipping through the plant was silver, so we weren't talking about seven ounces per ton of gold! Our gold content of our ore averaged about .04 ounces per ton out of the mine.

I want to back up here, too. You said you had water from a well. Was it a well that was created strictly for the mill?

That's correct.

And so part of the challenge was to make the best use of that water and not run out?

Right, because . . . well, you've seen Silver Peak . . . clean water (not the brackish water that's out there in the ponds in the floor of the valley where Cyprus has their lithium operations) around Silver Peak is a precious commodity. Our well that we drilled for the mill up there, I believe, was nineteen hundred feet deep. It cost quite a bit of money to put that well in. We supplemented mill water from the water that was pumped out of the Sixteen-to-One Mine, but we still had to use well water. That's what we called make-up water for the plant.

So you had the two sources for the mill—from the well and from the mine itself?

Right. That's true. In that country nobody likes to just dump water out on the ground and lose it.

So that was the point of the belt-press filter, to help recycle that water?

Recycle the water and also to eliminate the cyanide going out there in the water that was standing in the pond, because we could essentially take the water out of the tails at that filter and put it directly back in the mill. It never got dumped out on the ground in the pond, which . . . well, we never had a problem with bird kill or duck kill at the Silver Peak operations. But if we would have been running conventional tailings, say, in the late 1980s, I'm sure we would have been right up there with everybody else—some of the other operations that were always in the

news for the fact that they were killing birds that would get on their tailings pond. That was a solution to that problem. By returning what cyanide was left in there, we got to use it again. Basically, the plant sodium cyanide costs for the operation went down, and our mill make-up water costs went down, because we didn't have to rely on water that was pumped up out of the well, which, of course, took electricity to get it into the mill. And also, because we could de-water the tailings to the point where they could be stacked—physically stacked by pushing them up with a D6 Cat, we did not have to raise the tailings dam as often. And the capital involved with raising the tailings dam . . . one lift, I think, was somewhere on the order of a quarter million dollars.

I see. And that's if you've got the water still in the tailings?

You have to raise the dam.

Then you have to have the dam to hold everything in place. But without that, you can just pile it like sand?

Right. Exactly. It is moist sand, but we could just stack it with a Cat.

Now, the cyanidation process has been used in Silver Peak for a number of years. In fact, I think Silver Peak was one of the first to have cyanide mills.

That's right. The Nivloc Mine, which was halfway between our mill site and the Sixteen-to-One Mine.

Was one of the first? [The 1892 Chiatovich cyanide mill in Silver Peak preceded the Nivloc Mine operation.]

That's right, and the Nivloc mill dumped their tailings in the . . . well, you'd call it a creek. It never did run water year-round.

But the Nivloc tailings (unless they've done some reclamation on it, which I doubt) were essentially just a clogged creek. The creek was eventually diverted around them, but those tailings were sampled when we were there by University of Nevada Mackay School of Mines people to demonstrate that cyanide does destruct over time.

There was no cyanide in those tailings?

Zero.

OK, because that's been a concern of people who are worried about the environment, that the cyanide that goes out with the tailings is damaging the environment.

Right. Cyanide degrades very quickly in the environment, especially in sunlight. Now, all that's easy to say. The Nivloc was a good place to show that this stuff doesn't hang around. I can't remember what the cyanide concentrations were that the Nivloc put out, but they had to be every bit as high as ours, because the grade of ore was higher. That time probably would have been sixty years ago, and there was no cyanide left in the tailings.

But the process that you're describing that was used at the Sunshine mill was to get the cyanide out as much as possible first?

That's right, and return it to the mill where it could be used again.

OK. And that was a new process, the belt-press filter? Had you seen that anywhere else, or had it been used elsewhere that you're aware of?

Not in hard-rock mining. The unit we used was manufactured by Elmco, and it had been designed and used chiefly to de-water coal slurries back East, so it was, to my

knowledge, the first application to hard-rock mining in the United States.

How did you come to the decision to try that?

It was based on cost. We looked at the cost benefits . . . certainly the unit itself, the capital expense of putting it in. We had to build a separate building to put it in, and those costs weighed against the operations cost-savings over time. We looked at them . . . I could be wrong on this, but I think the payback—in other words, the amount of time that went by before we drew operations savings and paid for the installation of the thing—was somewhere around nine months, which is pretty short in terms of payback time. So it looked like, unless the unit just was a failure, that there was no reason at all why we shouldn't try and do it.

And the savings came from what?

Savings came from reduced cyanide costs in the mill, because we could return cyanide that was already put into the plant solution system and use it again. We didn't have to keep buying as much cyanide. It also came from savings in water. We didn't have to use water from the well for that, which had to be pumped out of the ground, so there was electricity savings there. And we saved the quarter-of-a-million-dollar capital expense of raising the tailings dam, so those were the main reasons.

We had some problems when the unit was first installed, the chief one being the life of the belts. The material was pressed between two belts. They looked kind of like a coarse-weave fiberglass or plastic material, which ore could pass through. And because coal is quite a bit different material than ground up quartz vein ore, we had some belt-wear problems initially, which made us go through quite a few belts. Those

were solved by making sure the distribution of the material on the belt was even across the width of the belt rather than just dumping it in a glob in the middle. Once that was ironed out, the unit worked just fine.

So there was a little adaptation of the unit, as well, to make it work for the ore. Any other problems with that?

No. I'm sure if you talked to Kenny Burton, who was our maintenance superintendent up there, Kenny can fill you in on some more headaches that I forgot about.

The belt-press filter process . . . you said that the ore is kind of squeezed between the two belts?

Right. And the water is allowed to pass through the belts and out of the tailings. And what's left in the middle between the two belts is basically just moist sand, tailings.

And a separate building had to be constructed to hold this equipment?

Right. Yes, that was simply because there wasn't room in the mill building to put it.

I see. Did it take extra people to run it, people who knew the process, or was it something that you could train people on?

No, no, we trained the existing people. I'm trying to remember if we added an additional person in the mill, and I don't think we did. It's something that pretty much ran by itself, and somebody would have to check on it periodically, but it didn't require an operator right in the building. Initially it did, but once it was up and running and the bugs were worked out, it didn't.

Were there any other innovations there?

Not really innovations. Up at the mine, we were the first mine in that area . . . well, probably the first mine in Nevada to use a mining method that was called modified vertical crater retreat. With this method, sublevels or drifts in the ore are driven every 125 feet vertically. Those were the spacings we used. And then, from the upper sublevels down to the lower sublevels, we used a drilling machine called a down-the-hole hammer rig, which drilled a five-and-a-half-inch hole, to drill holes from one sublevel to the other. And then those holes were loaded with explosives, and a large amount of material was blasted at one time, generally on the order of five hundred to seven hundred tons, something like that. It was a much lower-cost mining method than some of the other select methods, like shrink stope or cut-and-fill. We were able to use it at Silver Peak because of the attitude of the vein. In other words, it was fairly steeply dipping. Also the vein width . . . rather than being just three to four feet wide, which many of the veins in that country are no wider than that, the Sixteen-to-One vein averaged about fourteen feet wide overall and would get up to as wide as . . . it was fifty feet on one of our levels.

And was this [modified vertical crater retreat] a process that had been used elsewhere other than Nevada?

Yes, it was developed up in Canada in the Sudbury District. Canadians actually were the ones that worked it out. Then Allan had been up to Sudbury and toured those operations back in the late 1970s and realized that it was something that probably could be applied at Silver Peak. I think we ought to give the Canadians the credit for developing it. We probably added a few wrinkles to it there, just to fit our operation, but the basic method was developed up there at Sudbury.

Do you know what those wrinkles might have been that were added?

Well, surely if I mention something, and if you had a Canadian sitting there, they'd say, "No, we thought of that first."

The method kind of evolved to fit Silver Peak as we used it. We varied the number of holes, for example. We felt that the placement of the holes was very important, so we made sure that those were surveyed in by transit, or that survey points were put in for the drillers to work off of, so that they could accurately determine the location of the hole. Occasionally, we would survey the bottoms of the holes where they broke through, where we had access to do so, and we sampled the drill-hole cuttings—the geologists on a daily basis went down and logged the cuttings. That way we could tell when a hole got out of the vein and into the hanging or foot-wall waste. And by telling that, then we could say, "No, we better not use this hole. We better bring one in a little closer or a little further in, so we're not blasting waste." That's something we didn't start doing initially, but started to do after we got into operation. They do that up at Sudbury someplace, too.

But it was especially important there in Silver Peak?

Yes, it was, because we had to keep our dilution down. Dilution is the amount of waste material that comes in with the ore, because it's not worth anything. You might have to haul it and mill it. It's just material that you don't need to process.

So, there was the belt-press filter in the mill and the modified vertical crater retreat method in the mine. Were there any other things that were different in that area, or unique to that area, that you hadn't worked with before or that were new to Nevada?

Nothing comes to mind. I think those are the two major things.

And you were with the Sunshine Mining Company for how long?

Eleven years total . . . started in 1981 and left in 1992.

And during that time did you live in Silver Peak?

No, we lived in Tonopah, because my wife was working out at the Anaconda Hall Project (or they called it Nevada Moly at that time), which was about twenty miles outside of Tonopah. And because of the way the roads were configured, if we would have lived in Silver Peak, she would have had probably an hour and a half commute every day as opposed to the forty-five minutes that I had to Silver Peak by living in Tonopah. So Tonopah just made more sense for us. It wasn't that we were trying to avoid Silver Peak.

Did you get to know people in the town, though? You mentioned Ruby who you really liked.

Oh, sure. I stopped for beers on the way home from work occasionally, to go in the original Shifting Sands saloon, which was the only bar in town and was owned by Jim Gavin. Then competition opened in the form of the Dead Coon Saloon. A guy named James Allen, who ended up working for us later on, he opened the Dead Coon. He ran that for a couple, three years and then finally went out of business and went to work for us. He was an excellent mechanic. And by that time the old Shifting Sands had closed, and Hefty Sanderson had built and opened the Miner's Inn, which was actually the demise of the Dead Coon, I think, when Hefty opened that.

So just by stopping for a few beers and some of the other things that went on in town—Swimming Pool Cleanup Day, that sort of thing—I got to know quite a few of the townspeople.

Any memories that you'd like to share of times with the townspeople? You mentioned Swimming Pool Cleanup Day. I hadn't heard of that before.

Well, the swimming pool in town, the land that it was on was owned by what was then Foote Mineral and is now Cyprus. But Sunshine agreed when they went into town (and remember that Foote Mineral was there long before Sunshine was, as the only kind of an industrial operation in town) . . .

Because they arrived in the 1960s?

That's right. Sunshine agreed to jointly support the swimming pool from the standpoint of its operating cost. Foote actually did all the managing of it, but we paid half the bill. Once a year we would have Swimming Pool Cleanup Day. It was usually in the spring, when they finally filled the pool up with water after the winter, and that was always a good time. Generally, it was held on a Saturday and lasted all day . . . started early in the morning. And, of course, there was always lots of beer, and by the time the afternoon rolled around and the barbecue started, everybody was in pretty good shape.

[laughter] So it was fun and work.

Yes, those were fun. Individuals that I particularly enjoyed . . . of course, I mentioned Ruby. Her husband, Griff, owned an old, cable D8 Cat that we rented periodically there at the operations or out on our explorations projects. Griff was a first-class guy. Hefty Sanderson, of course, was a great guy. He and his wife, Alice, ran the

Miner's Inn there and certainly helped a lot of the townspeople out, especially some of the younger ones, with either hiring them when they were down and out, or they probably loaned money to quite a few of them to get them over hard times, I think. But they were enjoyable. Harvey Humphrey was a special delight. Harvey ran the only gas station in town at the time.

And now there's no gas station there.

Yes, I've heard that it shut down, because the tanks were above ground. But Harvey was an old miner. He'd fiddled around the area for years. I think he mined up at the Mary Mine for a while. I remember giving Harvey a tour through the Sixteen-to-One on the day we had our grand opening, which was kind of an event there for Silver Peak. We had the governor there and Sunshine's board of directors. We had a big barbecue and a tent set up outside the administration building next to the mill. Early that day we took Harvey on a personal tour through the Sixteen-to-One . . . put him on one of our what we called a Getman wagon, which was kind of a service truck, so he wouldn't have to walk through the mine. And he was amazed at the size of the drifts that we'd driven—couldn't believe that, because everything that he had worked in had been very small.

Harvey had been involved at the Nivloc Mine, too, with Jim Gavin, and Harvey made the comment, "You know, Jim and I never thought the Sixteen-to-One amounted to anything." The old Swedish guy that had discovered it back in the 1930s put a shaft down seventy feet or so and had not hit anything that really amounted to anything. He said, "Yes, we never thought this place amounted to anything at all up here, and now it's going to turn out to be one of the biggest mines in town." But he was kind of amazed.

A real comment on the difference in mining from the old days versus what can be done now. Is that true? Changes in the mining methods and so on?

Yes, that's right. The methods and the equipment available now that weren't available then.

Could they have gotten the silver out by the previous methods?

They could have, but it would have been much more labor intensive, and they would not have been able to mine the entire width of the vein because of the grade. They would have had to have gone for just the highest-grade portions of the vein and left a lot of the lower-grade material, which is what they did at the Nivloc. The Nivloc vein was very similar to the Sixteen-to-One.

That was one of those moments where the two eras met, when Harvey was underground?

Yes, exactly. So that was something. I never knew Jim Gavin. He had died just before I came to town. His widow, Marie, I didn't know her well, but she was always present in town at the Miner's Inn. You'd see her in there quite often.

I heard a comment that Sunshine Mining Company did some things for the community that have been really appreciated. Was there a lot of community involvement by the company?

Oh, yes. Yes, definitely.

More than just the swimming pool?

Yes. Well, let's see. Of course, we constructed the company housing units, which I think a lot of the townspeople are living in now, although I'm not sure who

owns them. Road improvements—because we were going to be a major taxpayer in the county, we got the county to upgrade their maintenance of the roads coming into town and going out of town. Just below the mine was a little lake called Silver Lake that, before the mine went in, was just sort of all grown up in weeds. It was fed by the springs above the mine. As late summer would come on, the flow would reduce, so the lake would pretty much stagnate. We used it as a discharge pond for the water that was pumped from underground. The part that didn't go to the mill was discharged down into Silver Lake, and it was clean water: there was nothing wrong with it at all. Then Nevada Fish and Game began to stock the lake, so it became a fishing hole for the town, eventually. And it was quite an event when they'd see the Fish and Game truck go through town to go stock Silver Lake. Half the town'd be following it right up there with their fishing poles. It became a place where you could go and have a picnic up there, and it was cooler, because it was a little higher up out of town, and there was the water, and kids would swim in it.

Kind of like the old days when there was a reservoir in town, and the kids all swam there.

Yes, right. So I think that was probably one of the major things we did. Although, for some reason, Marie Gavin never did understand just what happened there, because she made comments several times (made one to me one time down in the bar) that Sunshine had messed up and destroyed the lake. I never could understand why she felt that way, because, as I say, when we went in there it was pretty much overgrown with cattails and weeds and was sort of a mud hole. And then, afterwards, because of the water discharged from the mine, it turned into a lake again that would support fish. Marie obviously felt strongly for some

reason on that, because that was an issue she brought up several times with me, particularly after I took over from Allan as manager. But I could never understand her feelings on that.

I was going to ask you whether your job changed while you were there. You started out as the chief geologist. When did you change to manager?

Oh, let's see. Allan left in 1986, I think. And then I left in 1989 and was transferred up to Boise, Idaho, to manage the explorations for the whole company. And not very long after I left is when Sunshine shut the mine down and signed a lease agreement with an outfit called Zephyr Resources, which then came in and didn't resume mining at the underground mine, the Sixteen-to-One, but went up on Mineral Ridge at the Mary-Drinkwater and started open-pit mining up there on mineralization that we had drilled out when I was at Sunshine in Silver Peak.

OK. So from Zephyr, did that property go on to Mineral Ridge?

Well, Zephyr backed out and assigned the lease that they had with Sunshine to an outfit called Homestead Development out of Carson City. Homestead had a gypsum mine, I think, up out of Carson City, which was the only other thing that they had going. A guy named Art Wilson owned the company. And Homestead then came down and continued mining up at the Mary Mine. But they went bankrupt, and the ownership of everything was turned back to Sunshine. Sunshine originally had the Mary-Drinkwater and other properties up on Mineral Ridge under lease from a trust, a group of people back in Tampa, Florida. And, I believe, it was after Homestead left, or went bankrupt, that lease was returned to the trust by Sunshine, and Sunshine's involvement on

Mineral Ridge stopped at that point. I would imagine that Mineral Ridge Resources, Inc. has come back in and has agreements with all those underlying owners now.

I see. So that area is owned by a trust? Is that correct?

Part of it is. The Mary-Drinkwater area was owned by this trust. Moving up on top of the ridge, up to the Oromonte area and . . . (gosh, I'm forgetting the names of some of those places) the ownership on those was different. I don't remember that we had that, but I would assume that Mineral Ridge Resources has gone into consolidation and somehow has it all under control through agreements with the underlying owners now.

I see. Back to Sunshine's community service projects—you talked about the swimming pool, the company housing, improvements in roads and to Silver Lake. Were there any other projects for the community?

Donations to the school for things, and, of course, anything at all that was happening in town, like softball. There was a softball field constructed. In fact, we put that on ground that we owned. We built that. I think there was a Cub Scout pack or den that was out there, and, of course, we helped them with donations. Fourth of July parade—there was a parade through town, and we always funded and supported that or helped.

Was Sunshine involved at all in the community center, or did that come later?

No, the community center was there. I couldn't say for sure what our involvement in that was other than I don't think Allan ever turned anybody down on a request for money for something related to the town. But I couldn't specifically say what we did in

the early years. I know in the years that I ran the mine, a couple of times I had some maintenance people go down and fix things in the community center. I don't remember any direct financial support of it, although there could've been.

Did Silver Peak leave an impression on you?

Oh, yes, definitely.

More so than some of the other places that you've been, or the same?

Well, maybe a little more so, because I spent more time in Nevada, in Tonopah and Silver Peak. That's the largest single unit of time that I've spent in any one place since I got out of college twenty-five years ago. So, in that sense, yes, it's probably got a little bit stronger impression than some of the other places I've worked.

And just because of the time spent, or were there other factors that left such an impression on you?

The other factors'd be, I think, it was the first job I had, and I know that Allan had, where we actually got to control things in a mine. We were the decision makers as opposed to being pretty much the junior workers. We got to try things that we thought were good ideas, and some of them worked, and some of them didn't. But Sunshine was a very good company to work for in that respect, in that they placed a lot of faith in us even though we were all pretty young. I was thirty when I went there, and I think Allan was the same age (he might have been thirty-one), so we were pretty young guys being put in charge of a new mine. That was really exciting. And that's probably the only time . . . well, because I'm getting older. [laughter] That's going to be the only time I get to do that, and it was a lot of fun.

That's one of the only times in your life that you've been in total charge and could make decisions?

Well, shouldn't say that. It was the *first* time.

It was the first time, which is always the most memorable.

Yes, it was the first time, and for the most part everything turned out well, so it was deemed a success. So, yes, there was a lot of gratification to that.

Were there other things about Silver Peak that made impressions on you?

Well, every place I've worked has had its cast of characters, truly unique individuals, and Silver Peak was not alone in that. One event that I remember is one of the funniest things that I've seen—funny because I was an outsider looking in and didn't have any direct involvement in it, not an outsider from the standpoint that I didn't live in town. One of the guys that worked for Elton Parsons, who had a construction and equipment outfit there just as you come into town—tremendous boneyard of old equipment, used oil drums and whatnot Elton was a first-class guy. I really enjoyed working with him at the times that we rented equipment from him. He had a mechanic that was dating this gal in town, and they eventually decided to get married. She was a native, and her mother lived there, too. And the wedding was held at the Dead Coon Saloon, and it was a grand affair. It degenerated towards the end though, and this guy and his new bride got in a fight, not just a shouting match but a physical fight. They had known each other and lived together for probably two, three years. Anyhow, they got in this physical fight, and her mother got into it, and at the end of the day they carted her mother off with a broken

or dislocated knee. The bride was pretty well beat up, too. [laughter] I think he ended up in jail. But it was one of those things, when you're standing there watching it, it wasn't funny. But thinking about it afterwards you're inclined to say, "Only in Silver Peak could that happen." But that's not true.

But at the time you thought that, and why would you think, "Only in Silver Peak?"

Well, you tend to say that everywhere you are. I could tell you funny stories of every mine or camp that I've worked in, some of them funnier than that. You'd say, "Only in Park City could that happen." There was nothing peculiar about Silver Peak in that regard: it was not unlike the other places, in that it had its cast of characters, and some bizarre things would happen as life rolled on, and if you wrote a book about it, probably nobody would believe it.

There's sort of a rowdy element? Is that true of all mining towns? They're sort of out in remote areas.

Oh, yes, definitely. And Silver Peak was different from the standpoint that Well, for example, in Butte. If you went into the wrong bar in Butte, you got into a fight. If you didn't belong there, you were a problem. None of the bars in Silver Peak ever treated an outsider, a stranger in town, like that—at least while I was there. Everybody was pretty much accepted. You know, if they wanted to start trouble there were more than enough guys willing to give it to them, but it was a pretty cordial, accepting place from that standpoint anyway. But make no mistake, it could get rowdy. Most of it was alcohol derived. [laughter] There was a drug problem in Silver Peak, I know, when we were there. But, for the most part, what you ran into at

the bars was pretty much your standard, small-town, western stuff.

What kind of a drug problem? What drugs were in town?

Well, certainly marijuana. I imagine cocaine, although I can't say that for sure. I did work or keep in close contact with the deputy sheriff that was based in Silver Peak at the time that I was manager, and I know Allan did prior to me, so we were pretty much made aware of who was doing what as far as the deputy sheriff saw it.

Did you have trouble with your workers with drugs?

A couple of times, yes.

Were there any drug programs or alcohol programs available for workers that were having troubles?

We had no drug screening at Silver Peak—Sunshine didn't. Our corporate attorney was adamant that he did not want to get into that. He felt, at the time—and, you know, times were different then than they are today—that it would create a larger liability problem for Sunshine if we had a testing program. It's not a view that Allan and I shared with him.

Would you have preferred drug screening?

Oh, yes, yes.

For what reason?

Simply because mining's a dangerous business, whether it's underground or in the plant, and our great fear always was that if a guy shows up drunk to work, you can pretty much tell. If a guy shows up buzzed on something else, it's not always easy to tell. Our fear was that somebody would goof up

someplace, and somebody else would end up getting hurt or killed because of this guy's inability to function.

And as an employer, it was easier to see that somebody had too much alcohol and just send them home, correct? Whereas, with drugs you felt like you didn't always know?

[laughter] Plus, we knew who spent the night in the bar, because the town was the size it was.

[laughter] Yes, you knew before breakfast the next morning, right, in small towns?

Exactly. In fact, there's more than once when I would stop in the Miner's Inn to get a cup of coffee to take up to the mine, and there would be somebody sleeping—one of my guys with his head down on the bar. And I'd figure, "Well, he's going to miss shift," and then half an hour later I'd see him up, ready to go to work. And I'd have to go in and say, "No, I think you're taking the day off."

But the drugs were a different story, and the use of those was certainly a more private thing and not as easy to detect. As I say, Allan and I were always worried that somebody would get hurt or killed, which we then felt placed a tremendous amount of liability on the company. But we did have some incidences up at the mine, and I'm certainly not going to go into those. Some of the individuals involved went on to work elsewhere and certainly got their act together and are doing fine today. Some of them have disappeared.

I'm curious about the drug issue, just from a sort of a general standpoint, too. You started your work in 1973. In your time working in mining, have drugs been everywhere that you've gone?

Unfortunately.

The reason I asked is that I've been talking to some people who can remember back in the 1930s, and there's no mention of drugs until about the 1960s and 1970s when people started to notice it cropping up. Is that kind of what you hear, too?

Yes, I'd agree with that.

But today, a mining town still has the alcohol problem? It's still one of the ways that people get together socially.

That's right.

But it can also be a problem in terms of employee safety. Now there's also the drug element mixed in, and that tends to cause some problems, not only with employees on the job, but in the communities, too. Do you see that?

Oh, yes.

Is there a split, where alcohol's OK but drugs aren't?

Yes, I would agree with that.

Could you see that in Silver Peak?

Yes, oh, yes, I would agree. Some of the old-timers, natives who lived there, wouldn't look down on a guy at all who went down every night and got just totally blitzed in the bar, but don't talk to him about marijuana. That was the worst thing in the world.

They don't want it in their town?

No, no, definitely not. I would say if the local residents, the ones who were born and raised there, had any complaint about us or Foote Mineral, it would have been that, because of us being there, and because we attracted people from out of town, we were one of the reasons Silver Peak had a drug

problem. But yet, I never heard that mentioned. Nobody ever came up to me (certainly not when I ran the mine) and said, "You know, I wish you guys weren't here, because before you came we didn't have drugs."

It seems almost like it's one of those double binds, in that, for the most part, people welcome a mining company into a community, because you bring jobs, and you mean the survival of that small town.

That's right, and that was definitely true in Silver Peak.

And so, it may be difficult then to say anything about the negative side, which is that people who haven't lived there are coming in bringing drugs.

Yes, but every other place I've been, there's always been locals who have been more than happy to take the money that the mine provides the town but complain quite loudly about the social problems that the mine contributes to town. I won't say "creates," because I think all of them were already there. I think there were drugs in Silver Peak before either of the mines showed up there but probably not to the degree that there was after the operations went in.

But you didn't hear complaints about it?

No, I never heard that. I'm sure it was said, and Allan may have gotten some comments on that, but I never heard anything about that. Everyone was real appreciative of the fact that there were some good jobs in town. When we came into town our pay scale for a lot of job positions was in line with what Foote Mineral was paying, but we had positions that they didn't have, such as underground miners, which paid very well. And I think that had an effect on Foote

Mineral's pay rates overall. We were very careful when we went into town not to pay more than Foote Mineral did for like positions—for example, an office clerk. We made sure that the salaries were close, because that always creates a problem. A new mine comes in and starts paying a lot more than the guys that are there. The guys that are there may be just getting by, by the skin of their teeth, and they can't afford to pay anymore. But we did have positions that Foote didn't have, that definitely were very high-paying jobs for the area and for mining in Nevada, because we were one of the only underground mines in operation. And underground miners have historically been better paid than open-pit miners because of the skill level of the position.

My understanding is that underground miners still have a great deal of pride about their skill and a preference to do that work if given the choice.

Yes, no question about that.

Is there anything else about Silver Peak that you'd like to add or about Sunshine Mining Company while you were there?

There are many more funny stories to tell, and we could spend hours.

One thing we didn't talk about, which probably was the saddest thing that happened when I was there, was the death of Phil Lapp, Sunshine's mine superintendent. That's the only fatality we had at the operation. He was killed on the 6,810 level of the mine. He was what we call in the mining business "slabbed." A slab of rock or a piece of rock fell from the back, or the ceiling, and hit him. That . . . that pretty much summarizes it. I mean, I won't go into any gory details.

That was in the Sixteen-to-One Mine?

Yes, and that happened in 1985.

Nineteen eighty-five, so Allan Young was still there?

Allan Young was still there.

OK, and were you at work that day? Were you in the mine?

I wasn't in the mine at the time. I was down in the office, but I went up to the mine right after it happened. I went underground.

Can you tell me a little bit about how people coped with that? You went immediately to the mine—to do what?

To help dig him out.

And was he the only one who was at that level at that point?

No, there was a surveyor with him, a fellow named Andy Anderson, who now is back at the Silver Valley in Idaho working, I think. Andy was with him, and Andy was . . . buried about up to his waist. He wasn't hurt, but he was there. He saw the whole thing. And it was a case of, the chance was taken that shouldn't have been taken. We've all taken them in the mines at one time or another and gotten away with it, and Phil just didn't that day. So, we shut the mine down for a day after that happened . . . sent everybody home for the remainder of that day and, I think, the following day.

Then his funeral was a day or so after that in Silver Peak, down in the community center, and I remember a minister came from Tonopah to preside over that. About ten of the guys, the underground miners, showed up at the funeral with their diggers on—the clothes that they wore in the mine, with their hard hats and mine lights and everything.

Is that a sign of honor?

Yes, that was. They sat in the front row, and if you would have taken those guys and told them any other place that they had to sit—in the back rather than in the front row—they would have run out of the place. They came up and sat right in the front row, and they presented something to Sandy Lapp, Phil's wife, and I don't remember what it was.

Sounds like that was an incredibly emotional time.

Yes, that was. Well, it has to do with something you put up with every day working in underground mines. Underground mines are much more dangerous than open pits. In open pits you generally don't have anything that falls on your head. In just about every place that I have worked, every underground mine, there has been at least one person killed. And it's always something that just jolts you back to reality and makes you realize your own mortality. It just . . . I mean, you go down there every day, and you're very careful, but yet, you take chances and risks that you know you shouldn't be taking sometimes, but you get away with them. And then somebody who's your friend or somebody you know well ends up not getting away with something or killed because of nothing he did, just something that happened, and it always brings you back to reality really quickly.

It's a reminder of how dangerous this work is?

Oh, yes. It's dangerous every day, and no matter what you can do, how many regulations and laws are enacted, there's always going to be that element of risk there.

And what you're saying is that it's not always from taking a chance?

No, sometimes it's not. Although most times, at least the fatalities that I've been involved with, I'd have to say every one of them was that the guy just screwed up. He wasn't really watching what he was doing at the time he was killed. You know, when Phil was killed . . . again I won't go into details what he was doing, but I've done it, too. Not everybody, but the engineers and geologists who work there, we stuck our head in the same place he stuck his.

So it would have been something that you would know you should avoid, but everybody had at one time or another just taken that chance?

Yes, pretty much.

And it sounds like it impacted the entire community.

It did for a while, yes. Phil was well respected in the community. He was a good guy to work for. All the guys respected him, and he lived in town. He was quite active. Although he wasn't a drinker—he was never in the bars—but he'd go down there and stop in and have a Coke and chat with the guys once in a while. But he was always willing to help them . . . overlook some times when two or three of them were blasting back from Billy's whorehouse up by Mina and had a flat tire and got to shift late or something like that. He was always willing to overlook that. He was more than fair. He knew miners. He had been one at one time, so he understood them, and everyone respected him for that.

Mentioning the whorehouse, and we've talked about alcohol, are those ways miners deal with the danger on a day-to-day basis?

I don't think so. I did some mining when I started out at Idarado, before I went in the geology department. Now, I'd have to say it's

just a case of when you're single and you're working hard and making lots of money, you kind of get in the fast lane and like to have your fun. I mean, those guys work hard, and they play hard, too.

It sounds like dealing with the danger is more like putting it out of your mind until an accident like this happens.

Pretty much, yes. Pretty much.

OK. Were there any other accidents, or was that the main one?

That was the main one. No, all of our others were fairly minor.

That's a fairly sad note to end on. Is there anything else you'd like to mention about Silver Peak?

Well, I guess it was close to nine years, I made the drive pretty much every day from Tonopah to the town there, and it was about a forty-five-minute drive. I enjoyed it every day. There was never anybody on the road, so it was time to get my thoughts in order. Occasionally, going home at night when I was really tired, I didn't enjoy it quite as much. But the town itself was not an unpleasant place. In terms of other towns in Nevada that I don't like nearly as well—admittedly though, I haven't lived in places like Gabbs, Battle Mountain—Silver Peak had a lot of character. It was a very desolate place, but it was a really beautiful one, too. I used to enjoy sitting in the Dead Coon Saloon and looking out across the valley, because there were some big windows in place of where a back bar would normally be. So you could sit at the bar and look right out the window across the valley . . . barren and desolate, but it had a beauty all its own. It really wasn't a bad place.

For the most part, the people of the town were good people. You could call them real

people, if you want to call them that. They scratched out a living, had been able to stay there, live their lives there. There isn't one of them that wouldn't help you if you got in some kind of dire straits. They sort of understood the law of the desert, that everybody helps one another, because everybody needs help at some point in time. So people were enjoyable; the work was enjoyable; the country was certainly beautiful and interesting . . . not a place I'd want to spend the rest of my life, but looking back over all the places we've lived, Nevada's certainly not down at the bottom of the list.

Have you been back to Silver Peak?

Not since I left Sunshine, I haven't. No, so it's been four years since I've been there.

But you keep in touch? You know some of the news of the area, it sounds like.

Yes, I talk regularly with Allan Young. Allan's still at Sunshine out at Boise, and, of course, Sunshine still owns the mine and the mill there. I've run into people periodically that either work there or still live there. I sort of got brought up on all the news here recently. The fellow who was my chief engineer, John Barber, who now works for Freeport over in Indonesia at the big mine over there, he was down in Tucson at a meeting. We got together, and he happened to marry a girl from Goldfield, the town just to the east of Silver Peak there. So I got brought up on all the town gossip—who was doing what and the guys that are still around there that worked for us and what they're up to. So, yes, it's a place that it's fun to keep track of the people. But I kind of enjoy doing that every place I've worked, too.

Yes. There's a community of miners that exists outside of each little community, isn't there?

Oh, yes, very much.

THOMAS R. RINALDI

AT THE TIME of this 1996 interview Tom Rinaldi was general manager of Mineral Ridge Resources, Inc. in Silver Peak, Nevada. He was in the process of finalizing the permitting process, overseeing construction, and planning for operations of an open-pit, heap-leaching, gold-mining operation on the same location as several of the historic Mineral Ridge Mining District's claims.

Rather than looking at the past, Tom gave a unique perspective of history in the making—a glimpse of the future of the properties that included the Mary, Drinkwater, Gordon-Brodie, and Oromonte mines. In addition, Tom's personal story places him as one of a new breed of tramp miner. He has a degree as a mining engineer and moves approximately every two to three years seeking opportunities which will advance his career. He started mining underground and quickly moved into the open-pit, heap-leach operations common in the 1980s and 1990s.

One historic Saturday, the old and the new met for a day of videotaping at the Mineral Ridge Mining District as Merle Swanson, one of the 1930s underground bosses, explored the changes at the Mary



and Drinkwater mines with Rinaldi and Ben Viljoen, who was also a tramp miner trained by old-timers with underground expertise. Discussions between the three men reflected the changes in perspective on gold mining in Nevada over the past sixty years.



VICTORIA FORD: *Today is September 24, 1996. I am here with Tom Rinaldi in the Mineral Ridge Resources office at Silver Peak, Nevada, and we're going to be talking a little bit about the current day, or history as it's happening, in Silver Peak. First of all Tom, I'd like to have you give me a little background about yourself. Would you tell me when and where you were born, and then kind of bring me up to date on your connection with Nevada, please?*

THOMAS R. RINALDI: OK. I was born in Santa Cruz, California, forty years ago today. In fact, forty years ago today about an hour ago. [laughter]

Happy birthday. That's great. [laughter]

I moved to Colorado when I was almost ten, the summer of 1966, and pretty much stayed in Colorado until I graduated from high school. I started college in Colorado. I was kind of on the long program—it took me a few years. I worked at this and that, and I finished school at the University of Arizona in 1983 with a B.S. in mining engineering.

Tell me a little bit about that long trip through college, because you gained some experience along the way. Is that correct?

During the years I went to college (when I wasn't in college), I was working as an underground miner in Colorado.

OK. And did you start out knowing that you wanted to go into mining when you went to college?

I started out in geology, actually, and then decided that geology was just too much memorization. I needed things I could figure out and switched to an engineering curriculum. The first engineering curriculum I was in was civil engineering, and [I]

quickly decided that I wanted to go into mining.

And what attracted you to it?

Well, one of the jokes I always tell people is because I didn't want a desk job, and that's exactly what I have today. But I like being out, actually doing things, constructing things versus just all the paperwork that was involved with some of the other engineering disciplines. I did like engineering, because you get to actually build things, figure things out. You have a set of parameters, and you have to do something with it.

Solve problems and that sort of thing.

Most definitely.

OK. And then what about mining? You started out doing some underground mining. Was that your first experience with it?

Yes. There was some experience that I got within the school environment and then also summer jobs. But then, when I quit school for a couple of years to work, I decided, "Well, let's make sure this is really what you want to do." So I did get a job as an underground miner and fell in love with it. I mean, it didn't matter—when I graduated from college, mining was in the doldrums and jobs were far and few in between, but I just didn't want to do anything else.

What jobs did you have underground for that three-year period?

Well, the first two years were underground, then I spent about nine months on the surface. I transferred into the engineering department, and the reason for that is because I'd just gotten married, and a day job sounded kind of nice for a newlywed. But I was a development miner—I did raise

mining; I did drift mining, rock bolting, mucking—pretty much everything that an underground miner does. I was in a modern mine by standards: it was all rubber-tired equipment. We did not deal with the small, rail-type environment. It was all very large, high production, so it was a modern mine by those standards.

OK. And so the distinction is the rubber tires and no old rails and ore carts?

Right. Rubber tires, large equipment. In the mine where I was, we had 300 pieces of diesel equipment underground. We had about 300 miles of drift. It was huge.

Wow. It was a huge operation. Bringing out how much a day?

Thirty-two thousand tons. Yes, we're going to be producing about 28,000 tons from an open pit here, and we were bringing more than that from underground.

Compare that to the days of, say, the E.L. Cord Mill.

That was, on a good day, 500 tons, so sixty-four times that.

OK, which tells you how far technology had come in the area that you're working in now and even from when you began work in mining. From two years of underground, what other experience did you have as background during college and right after?

OK, after that, I moved to Arizona where I got my degree, and because of labor disputes, some of the summers I just went to school, because my wife was working as a mining engineer. And there was no reason for me to get a minimum-wage job to work at McDonalds or whatever. For my summer job, I was going for the experience. The

money was nice, of course, but it was primarily for the experience that would help me out with my career.

Is it unusual that you and your wife both have degrees in mining engineering?

It sounds unusual. No, it's not. It is probably unusual that we got married in school. A lot of the couples we meet got married in the workplace. So my mining background, prior to getting my degree, was three summers. I spent one summer at an open pit, a strip coal mine in the outback of Australia. I spent one summer in a copper mill as just a laborer—one day on a shovel, one day on a hose—you know, that sort of thing, just grunt work. And then I spent one summer as a haul truckdriver at a copper mine. So those three summers were all surface-type environments.

Then you had your degree?

Yes.

What did you do right out of college?

Then I went to work for Magma Copper Company at their San Manuel operation in Arizona, about fifty miles north of Tucson. At the time it was, and I think it still is, the largest underground mine in North America. It was even larger than the other mine I worked at. The first mine I worked at, our ore came out via a tunnel. This one, we had to hoist everything through shafts, and we were hoisting 66,000 tons a day—more than double what the other one was. It was a low-grade copper mine, 0.65 percent, which by world standards is low, but it's very good grade for the United States. I spent roughly two years there. The first year I was there I spent as a draw boss working in the grizzly drift with crews of anywhere from five men to forty men. And that is the first point of production, where you're actually taking

the material and putting it into the draw raises where the trains pick it up below. The second year I was there, I was on the haulage crew where we were getting the ore from the stopes to the shafts to be hoisted. Very rewarding job—a very frustrating job.

Tell me about the two extremes.

Well, front-line supervision can be very rewarding, because you're given a goal on a day-by-day basis, and it's between you and the mountain, so to speak. You, your crew, and the mountain—to get that job done as safely as possible, as cost effective as possible, and just to meet your production goals. The frustrating part about it, it was a forty-year-old company with 5,500 employees. Politics were horrendous.

It was a big company then?

Very large.

And what would have been an example of the politics?

I was an engineer. Engineers, typically in that sort of environment, are there to learn the job and then are promoted very fast. So you're working for people that are in their position, and that's probably where they're at, and there's a lot of resentment.

They're going to stay, and you're going to move up?

You have the upward mobility: they do not. So people try to set you up, things like that. And in southern Arizona, there was a bit of a racial issue. It was not company-wide but just with individuals.

OK. And what was the racial issue? Was it with Hispanics?

Yes, with Mexicans versus this white boy with a degree. [laughter] Like I said, it wasn't unilateral or anything. It was just a select individual here and there, and it's just something you had to deal with.

So, actually, you got some discrimination—the white boy with the degree. The new kid on the block.

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. And that discrimination wasn't strictly with the Mexican foremen that were there. The worst one I had was just with a normal Caucasian against myself. He tried to set me up for a fall. His goal was to get me fired. [laughter] And then I used to joust with him every month, because, given that situation, I took it as a challenge. He was trying to set me up to have my crews have accidents, and that was one way to wash them out. OK, my crews exceeded all the safety requirements, and for the last six months I was there I was on the safety-award list every month. And I'd go up in there, and I'd poke him in the ribs and say, "Made the list again." [laughter] So that was kind of fun. If people are trying to get me, I enjoy getting back at them in a fair sort of way.

Is that unusual? This political thing and trying to set you up—even to the point of risking accidents to workers?

No. The way he was setting me up is, he put me in as a relief foreman, so I did not have the same crew two Well, the maximum was two days in a row. I usually had a different crew every day, so I didn't know who the problem people were. I had a different work area every day, things like that. Just trying to put me in the worst set of circumstances.

So that your record would be the worst, is that right, as the leader?

Yes. He wasn't trying to set anybody up to get hurt or anything, it was just that when you don't know what your crew's experience is, that can be a problem, especially in a potentially dangerous environment.

That had to have been excellent training for what you're doing now, though.

Oh, working with people?

And changing crews every day. As difficult as that must have been, what great training for what you're doing now.

[laughter] The school of hard knocks.

Right. So how did you get from there to Silver Peak, Nevada?

That's a good question. Get comfortable.

[laughter] *It's going to take a while?*

OK, when I was in the copper business, copper was in the doldrums. We're talking fifty-eight cents, sixty cents a pound, sixty-five cents a pound. We were at an underground copper mine. When I first went into this, our production costs were about, oh, mid-nineties, so we were losing money. And we were going through an austerity program—doing everything we could to save money. During the end of the period I was there, I think we had our production costs down to about seventy-one cents, so we were losing about a nickel a pound.

Well, we were at the point that it was cheaper to operate than to shut down because of the standby costs, because of the huge capital investment. We're talking billions of dollars in a large mine like that. And, basically, my wife and I (we didn't have any children at the time), because she was working there also, we got tired of the politics and this and that, and we really

wanted to get into the gold business. And we had an opportunity to come north on a family silver venture, which was the wrong thing to do. Spent a year doing that, and spent a lot of money. Lost a lot of money, and [laughter] decided to get a real job again and go back to work. And through some people I knew from working here and there, I called around and found a new project that was opening in Austin, Nevada, and got a job there as a foreman. I was there two years. It was one of those projects that was supposed to be a three-year project with eight years of potential, that lasted two and a half years. [laughter]

OK. [laughter] And is that fairly typical?

No, no. That is atypical.

Usually, when they project a certain number of years that's about right?

Right. It was a very hard ore body, and I guess hindsight would say it should have been left there. The company didn't make money on it. I was there two years. The first year I was there as a pit foreman. And then, because of people leaving and this and that, my second year there (or the last nine months or whatever it was) I was the senior mine engineer doing the pit designs, the production recording, scheduling, things like that. We decided to high grade the pit, because we were losing money.

What does that mean, "high grade"?

We were leaving the low grade. We were going for the highest—the most ounces, the least amount of tons. So we downsized the pit. I did the final design and decided, "Well, the writing's on the wall. They don't have any other operations. It's time to start looking." From there I went to Hawthorne, Nevada, working for the Aurora Partnership. I was again a senior mine engineer and then

was promoted to chief mine engineer in the two years I was there. Another small company. There was not a whole lot of upward mobility, so after two years I started looking again. And the route I've taken . . . in the small companies you've got to be fairly mobile, because a lot of times you end up with a situation where there is no upward mobility. If you want to advance in your career, you just need to move. That's what happened at that point.

I could have had a job there for close to ten years, but it would have been the same job, which, I mean, there's nothing wrong with that, but I had different ambitions.

From there, I went to Ely, Nevada, as the mine superintendent of another operation that was opening up. Small operation again. And for that company I worked at three different projects. I went to one project, and then it was tied in with another project that I helped open up, and we were kind of using the same processing facility for those two. And then I built an entirely different operation in the same general district but about twenty-five miles away. I was there a little over three years with that company and that property . . .

Was that a gold mine?

This is all gold mining. Yes, starting in Austin, it's all gold. I was there a little over three years, and that project was sold to a different company. It was a company that had an adjacent property, a very large mining concern. I think they're the third largest in the world. They bought the company. My position quickly became redundant, and I was on the street. [laughter] That was U.S.M.X. I was working for, and the company was purchased by Placer Dome. And you probably recognize the name, being one of the big boys on the block.

I was looking for another job, but, you know, it's business. I walked with a

reasonable severance package, and I wasn't hurt, and I managed to be employed before my severance ran out. I lost money on a house, but other than that, I've learned I don't invest in mining communities anymore in real estate.

Real estate is not where you're going to make your money.

No, but I can tell you what not to do in real estate. From there I got a job back in Hawthorne with a company by the name of Nevada Goldfields, a very small gold-mining company. It was an underground and open-pit operation with a mill. Prior to this I've been bouncing back and forth between mills and heap leaches. Most of my experience is heap leach, but I do have some milling background also.

Quite a combination of technology with the underground mining, and some that dates way back, in addition to the heap leaching which is more recent. Is that correct?

Yes. Heap leaching probably came in the 1960s when the technology started being developed. And the difference in the mid- to late-1960s, early 1970s, compared to what we're doing today, heap-leach technology has made quite a lot of strides for the better. We know a lot more about what we're doing.

Well, we still have a couple more stops. [laughter] Anyway, I was back in Hawthorne for a year. Everything was going well with that job. I had been hired on to solve some problems. I solved those problems, and then another company made me an offer I couldn't refuse, and that was in Goldfield, Nevada, just thirty miles east of here, so I took that job. I was there about a year and a half in Goldfield. The company I was working for over there was going through hard times, turbulent times. In the first year I was there, I had five bosses. And this is all at the executive level, so I would also joke

with my bosses, "Well you better either put your resume out or get rid of me, because I'm hard on bosses." Anyway, that company went through a merger, and I was due to be transferred. At the same time, Cornucopia, which is the parent company of Mineral Ridge, started looking at me. For a little bit of stability for my family and the intrigue of building a project for myself from the desert up, I decided to stay in Tonopah and take this new job.

Can you talk a little bit about stability for the family, because what you've just listed are a series of moves about every year to three years? Is that right?

Yes, probably average about two. Let's see, two years in Austin; two years in Hawthorne; three years in Ely; a year back in Hawthorne; and a week away from being two years in Tonopah. [laughter]

And how was that for you and your wife and for your family?

OK, my wife was raised in Ely, Nevada. She is familiar with the Nevada environment. She likes Nevada. I mean, some people come to Nevada and just absolutely hate it. I don't have that problem. My family is I have five children. The oldest has just turned ten, so my family is fairly young at this point. The bouncing around is a little easier on them. They don't like it, but we're rapidly getting to the point where that's getting tougher and tougher.

As they get older, into the high schools and that sort of thing?

As a result of that we (primarily my wife) have made the decision that we're homeschooling our children right now, to at least have a little bit of continuity there. And it's worked very well.

That's a big undertaking, homeschooling.

Yes. It is a lot of work. It is a lot of work, but you find out, when you get away from the regimentation of public schools, you really don't have to spend a whole lot of time, and kids will teach themselves. You prod them along, you help them here and there. You're not governed to forty-five minutes of this and one hour of that. You have a lot of flexibility there. And when children are ready to learn one particular thing, they're like little sponges. So, on that side it works very well.

So you've named two things that you and your wife have done to cope with the gypsy lifestyle of mining. One is that you've taken a job so that you can stay in this area, and two is that you're homeschooling the kids. Are there other ways that you're dealing with it?

I guess leisure activities center around the family. We try to do a lot of camping and traveling with the family. We don't leave our kids and take off for a week or two. We've been away from them for weekends at a time, but we try to include them in on vacations and things like that.

Yes, to build the stability within the family, so that whatever happens you can all cope with it, is that right? And your wife has her degree and was working in mining, but now she's staying home, raising children, doing homeschooling. I assume taking on the majority of that. Is that right?

Yes, she is. I help out with it, but she's definitely the primary person there.

OK. All right. But before that and before family, you folks were moving pretty consistently.

Oh, about the same—two years here, two years there.

I hear people joking about “don’t unpack the boxes,” so it’s evidently part of the business.

Well, in fact, some friends of ours that just live about a half a block away, they work for the county, and he just took a job with the state, and they’re moving to Carson City. I asked her if she needed any boxes, and she said, “Well, yes, that would be very helpful. Do you have any?” She came over last night, and she couldn’t believe how many boxes I had in my garage. [laughter] The moving boxes, we just break them apart and throw them up in the attic. We know we’re going to need them.

So when you took this job, one of the things that really appealed to you was starting a project from the ground up? Can you describe what is involved in that?

Chaos. [laughter] I guess, to put it in one word. Right now we’re getting to the end of the permitting cycle to get started. That doesn’t mean the permits are going to end. There are still other permits we have to get, but we can get them while we’re doing the initial stages of the operation.

OK, and you’ve been here since May, but when did the permitting process start? You say, “We’re at the end of it.”

About two years ago, so it’s a very long and drawn-out process. And it seems we’re always dealing with something that we didn’t anticipate.

OK. Can you give an example?

There’s this fire to fight. Well, we’ve tried to schedule start-up dates and the start-up dates We had a target date for the E.A.

(environmental assessment) to be signed by July 19 [1996]. OK, we missed that by a week. It was signed the following Friday, so we were real close on that one. But then you think, well, your environmental assessment is out of the way, but then you’ve got all these other state agencies you have to deal with also, and they all have this thirty-day comment period—and thirty days for this, forty-five days for that. And then after they say it’s OK, then we’ve got fifteen days to write the permit, and the state is understaffed. My major argument with the state is, they’ll put one person on your particular project, and if that person goes on vacation or something, it comes to a grinding halt. And that has cost us a few days here and a few days there. Now here it is September 24, and we’re hoping to get started October 4, which is about two months later than we wanted to be started. But it’s just all these little things. This is the first one that I’ve gone through the initial permitting on, so these are areas I didn’t anticipate. I guess I know a whole new set of questions to ask for the next project, which will help.

And you have a list on your wall of the permits.

Approximately twenty, plus or minus a few. Some of them are major, some of them are minor. The three . . . well, the four major permits—you have the environmental assessment, which is your major plan of operation, which is with the BLM, which is the lead agency for this project. Once that is out of the way (and we’re working on all these permits in conjunction with each other), then we have the three major state permits—which is the reclamation permit, which we’re about ready to finalize right now, which is going to give us this October 4 start-up date. The other two major permits are water-pollution control, because we are dealing with toxic substances that we must contain, and also the air quality permit.

With those two, we can go ahead and get started mining. But in order to construct the components that those permits deal with, we have to have those permits in place first.

So some parts of the mining process can start, but not those parts. Is that right?

Right, and those are construction. And with our schedule, because of our limited space up on top of the mountain, we have to do a certain amount of mining before we can do this construction, so it's going to be tight time-wise, and I'm not going to say we're not going to have any construction delays, but we are trying as hard as we can to avoid them. If there are, I think they'll be minor, like possibly a week or two.

And then there's all the minor permits. Our solution pond has the diluted cyanide solution in it. We had to have it permitted with the Department of Wildlife. We have to have explosives permits. We have to have permits for the beneficial use of the groundwater of the state. Oh, storage of the fuels on-site—we have to have the state fire marshal sign off on all our buildings. Just you name it. Everybody wants a piece of the pie, and every one of these permits comes with a fee [laughter]—\$100 here, \$8,000 there, and just about everything you can imagine in the middle. There is no permit that they just give you. [laughter]

And Tom, you made a comment when we were doing the videotaping out by the mine about all of the environmental regulations. Could [you] explain in more detail why you think we're where we need to be with those?

Well, let's do a little bit of background. Mining began in Silver Peak in 1863. When we were up on the hill over the weekend, we were with Merle Swanson, and he was here in the 1930s. OK. During both those periods, which are probably two of the three major

phases of mining here in Silver Peak prior to now, there were essentially no permits. In 1872, we got the mining law, which allowed for being able to acquire the land to do mining. It allowed for the claim processing and the patenting of those claims. That law has worked very well over the last 125 years. Anyway, since then, with the environmental movement that's gone through the United States in the last twenty or thirty years, we are under much more regulation. Most of it centers around environmental impacts, because mining is a type of work that does impact the environment.

I said over the weekend that I felt we were at the plateau we needed to be. You know, mining is needed for society, but the regulations we have now are . . . well, like ours. We're dealing with toxins. We are a totally closed-circuit system, so we don't discharge anything. We're required to monitor all our solutions for leaks, and anything like that has to be reported. Any spills have to be reported. Reclamation—the state of Nevada doesn't require that you take it back to where it doesn't look like you've been there, but in the multiple-use policy of the Bureau of Land Management, we have to bring it back to a condition that allows for beneficial use. The three main areas of multiple use in the Silver Peak area are recreation, mining, and grazing. And I would say grazing, because of the low moisture this area gets, is probably number three in those, but this is a cattle range.

OK. So when you leave this project, you have to do what?

The reclamation activities. Basically, the goal is to make it for future minerals exploration, for recreation, and for grazing. OK, for the grazing, we need to reduce the slopes of our waste dumps and our heap and things, so that vegetation can grow on it. We do need to seed it. Recreation-wise, we need to make the place accessible and also safe—

in other words, deny access or keep people out of places where they can hurt themselves, because, as we all know, people can do dumb things. [laughter]

[laughter] When you talk about the closed system, you're using the heap-leach process up there. And that uses the cyanide, which is similar to what was used (am I correct) back in the E.L. Cord Mill, which we looked at?

Yes. Cyanide technology came in after the turn of the century. In fact, the Blair Mill did use cyanide.

Right. And so that's the same process, but explain the difference—where they were an open system and yours is a closed system. Give me some more detail about that.

OK, basically, theirs was kind of an open system where they just dumped their tailings. They tried to reclaim as much of the cyanide as possible, but the stuff they did dump, they just kind of sent it down the mountainside. And the tailings, wherever gravity took them is where they went.

In fact, we can see those down by the road on the way in to Silver Peak.

However, cyanide is a very delicate compound. Oxygen and sunlight break it down. Those tailings are anywhere from sixty to ninety years old. I seriously doubt there are any toxic levels of cyanide in them.

But you can't do that today.

No, everything has to be closed. That was a mill environment where they pulverized the material, so they could get the gold out. We are just doing a fine crush. Instead of taking it down to a fine sand or a

flour-type material, we're taking it down to an eighth-inch gravel. And then we're irrigating it with the dilute cyanide solution. That will pull the gold into solution, and then we process it from there. However, our gold ore that we're irrigating with this cyanide solution is on a plastic membrane, so that, as the solution goes through, it's collected on this plastic membrane and drains into a pond. From there, we process it through our plant. We bring the strengths in this water back up to the leachable cyanide strength, and then we send it right back up. So basically, it goes onto the heap, down to the plastic, into the plastic pond, through the plant, back to the pond, up through the heap. The water we lose is for two reasons only—bringing the ore up to a moisture content that the water will pass through it and through evaporation.

OK. So that's the only way you lose water. Other than that, it's all recycled continually. And maybe now's a good time to talk about the changes in the heap-leaching technology that you've seen just in the time you've been working in mining.

OK. Heap leaching began in the 1960s. It wasn't very widespread. It's ore specific. Some gold ores you just can't heap leach, because you have to take the material down to a flour size to liberate the gold. Here, basically, we have free gold and electrum [a gold-silver metal], and it's on the micro-fractures. So by taking it to this eighth-inch size, we are opening up enough of those fracture planes that we get a good recovery.

The other thing that dictates between a milling environment and a heap is the grade of ore—how much gold is in every ton of rock and the amount of it that you have—because a mill is much more capital intensive than a heap-leach project is. You're probably talking four to five times as expensive to build. And you either need to have the sufficient grade to recover that

capital quickly, or you have to have the longevity to recover it over time.

OK. And so how has that process improved, the heap-leaching process? Has there been technological improvements over the years?

Yes. One of the things that we're concerned with is getting solution to the entire pile of ore we have there. We use cement to tie up the fines, so that we don't create blind spots in the pad. When heap leaching first began, it was just taken out there with trucks and dumped. We use conveyors and radial stackers, so that there's very little compaction on the material before we leach it. Crushing has been developed better and better, so we can crush cheaper. We can crush finer if need be. And milling has gotten better, also.

It's just basically experience. We know more of what we can do with it. Well, for example, let's just say that fifteen or twenty years ago the rule of thumb for your cyanide strength was much higher than it is today. We know how little we can actually get away with and still cost-effectively leach the gold out of the ores.

So the decision to do open-pit mining, heap-leach process and so on, there's a number of variables that bring you to the decision of how you're going to do the mining and milling in that area where the old Mary Mine is.

Historically, it's been an underground mine here. We are doing just the opposite in open pit, heap leach. The milling versus the heap, it's an economic decision, but we just know so much more today. Well, they didn't know about heaps back at the turn of the century. The metallurgical test work, just through experience, we know much more about what we can and cannot do. So that

gives you the heap versus the mill for our current operation.

The other thing is, we have roughly a six-to seven-year project here. And where the decision is made is We get a certain recovery with the heap leach. We're going to get a higher recovery with the mill, because we're exposing more gold. But it's a difference in recovery—the mill's going to make more money than a heap, but that difference has to pay for the increased capital. [The cost of the mill.] In this situation, it's not there, because we have a relatively short mine life.

Whereas, back when Merle Swanson was working here, there were limited options? You did underground mining, and you did milling. Those were the options, and you just tried to get out the best grade of ore that you could?

Well, underground you're going to take all ore if you can. Granted you always have to mine some waste, and you can see from the old waste piles up there. With open-pit mining you're going to be taking a lot more waste, but with the larger equipment, more efficient equipment, both on the engineering side and the actual earthmoving side, we can move that material for much less than we could even thirty years ago. A lot has changed, you know. Engines have gotten more efficient. Engines have gotten larger. Tire technology is a big one. Fifty or sixty years ago tires wouldn't hold the weight that we're putting on them today with the synthetics and things like that.

For example, there were some brand new trucks up there when we were up there doing the filming, and you called those the "babies" of the industry, right?

They're 58-ton class trucks, which is the payload. The large mines in the state are

using 240-ton payload trucks, so five times the size of what we have.

OK, the American Mining Congress was just in Las Vegas, and you were down there. That's where some of the newest technology in mining comes out. Is that correct?

Basically, that is the equipment show. It's every four years, and we all go there and see what's new on the block.

OK, what was new that interested you . . . that you'd like to try out? (This is a little side trip that we're taking here, but I'm curious.)

Oh, basically, I've been employed with the small mining side. I go down there and look at all the large equipment and think, "Wouldn't it be nice to have a project that we could afford a fleet of these things."

Just some of the new designs on the equipment they're trying . . . everything has problems. We're attacking a mountain, and you're putting stresses on it that are going to break certain parts of the machine. And the different manufacturers have taken this, and they're trying to redesign things to try to get away from this, and it's interesting to see. There were some new designs down there. Are these really going to work? I guess we'll find out in a few years.

Plus some of the computer technology that's starting . . . is already a part of . . .

Yes, it's definitely already a part. When I went to school, computers were just starting to come into it. We were using them as high-powered adding machines. That's basically what they are today, but ore reserves were calculated by hand. We did have calculators then, so it wasn't with a slide ruler, but years ago it was. All ore reserves are done with computers today. We take the assay

information from the exploration drilling, 3-D models are created, and everything is done within the computer. Major change. We are able to model ore bodies with more information and with a whole lot less time. Computers can do it so much quicker. I'd hate to do the math calculations that are required to develop a project even this size.

So with the computer, you can really envision what's under there, what you're going after, which is different than when Merle was working in there.

They were following a vein. Whereas, what we've done is, mathematically, we've modeled it. We know where this vein is.

That would be amazing, if he could see and understand that, huh?

Well, some of the comments that he made on Saturday were, he doesn't think we can do this by open-pit methods. Well, we'll bring him back in a few years . . .

And show him what you've done? It's interesting, because it was a real comment on the two time periods. What he was saying made sense for his time period.

Oh, yes. And it wasn't, "I think you're going to have problems." It was just an absolute statement: "You aren't going to do this."

You talked a little bit about the small corporation. You were in a big corporation in Arizona. Now you're part of a small corporation. What do you like about the small corporation?

I get to do more. We refer to it as wearing many hats. Sometimes it's how many balls can you keep in the air as a juggler. [laughter]

In one day. [laughter]

Yes, or at any one time. But what I really like is, I get to do a lot of things. I'm fairly young for the position I hold, so I've advanced very rapidly by being in a small company. But I'm on a first name basis with everybody in the company. There are no "misters." There are none of the stiff, three-piece suits back in New York that you never see or you never talk to. I talk to everybody. I get to see everybody. They all come here. We're not just a line on some balance sheet.

Plus, you get to help create the atmosphere here, because you're the leader.

Yes, and if you haven't guessed by now, I am what I refer to as a people person.

Right. You seem to like having that first-name basis and everybody feeling like they have an investment in the project. Will you describe your management style?

I guess I like to let people do what they're trained to do. The group we have here right now, because we're not in operation yet, are primarily professionals. I'm under the assumption that these people know what they're doing. I'm not going to watch over every last little thing they do. It's physically impossible. If they can't do their job, well maybe they're not the right people for that job. So, basically, I'm just kind of the leader of this band of misfits. To be in the mining industry you have to be somewhat insane. [laughter]

Why is that? [laughter]

It's very chaotic. As we discussed earlier, I'm basically a tramp miner. I'm not the old underground tramp miner. I'm just the 1990s version of the tramp miner, as it were. I'm here for a couple of years, there for a couple of years. I won't say it's because my

foreman upset me, and I'm not going to work for him and just leave, like people used to do way back when. But it's opportunities and things like that. That's why I tramp around, I guess.

Yes, something different to learn. OK. I'm going to go away from mining for just a little bit and talk about Silver Peak when you first came and started working here in May. Can you tell me what kind of impact Mineral Ridge Resources is going to have on Silver Peak in terms of jobs, improvements? There are some known numbers that you can give me on that?

Yes. Well, one thing you're going to have to work into this is the remoteness of Silver Peak. We are not on any thoroughfare. We are at, as we say, the end of the pavement, literally. [laughter] Silver Peak has always been a mining town. That's the only reason it's here. The mainstay of Silver Peak right now is Cyprus Foote Mineral. They employ, I believe, about sixty-five people. Our operation is going to be about ninety people, so the jobs in Silver Peak are going to more than double. The impacts—well, when I showed up in May there was no restaurant in town. We now have a restaurant in town. We have another one that may open. It's a bar, and, eventually, I believe it's going to be a restaurant and bar. So we're going to have two businesses in town, whereas before we had none.

Was there any business in town when you got here?

Well, besides Cyprus, the bar that's currently being remodeled was here, but that was it. You could get milk. You could get eggs. You could get a beer. You could even get candy bars there. [laughter]

That's what I noticed at the restaurant now, is that they have milk and eggs.

They're starting to stock the essentials. Bread and things like that. The perishables that people can't get in Tonopah or Bishop or wherever they choose to do their shopping.

Right, it's kind of a quick-stop-restaurant combination.

Yes, and, of course, bar. [laughter] This is Nevada. [laughter]

That's right, and bar. So it's three businesses under one roof, essentially.

Yes, the other thing that I've noticed just lately is a lot of the people that own buildings here in town are starting to refurbish them. One example is the six studio apartments down here by the restaurant. They've got a new coat of paint on them, and you see people working on them every day. So these people are going to take advantage of the boom. They've got property. Silver Peak has been stable for how many years? But they realize that there's going to be a need for housing, because not everybody's going to want to drive fifty miles to work. There's rumor that there's another place that's being refurbished. Some houses here and there. We see "for rent" posted on different bulletin boards around town. So it's going to revitalize the town somewhat.

This also brings money into the town for support of the community projects, like fire fighting. Is Mineral Ridge going to be involved in those types of things for the community service?

We have a volunteer fire department, a volunteer EMT, et cetera. These people come to us for support. They need support for the swimming pool in town, things like this. As a member of the community, we need to help support those functions. And

then you're going to bring it up, so I'll go ahead and discuss it right now. [laughter] The hot topic today is, Silver Peak is the poor red-headed stepchild at the family reunion in Esmeralda County. Our office sits on school property. We are renting it from them. A couple of months ago, the superintendent called me up and asked if we could pay two years in advance for a capital project he had. Well, naively, I said, "Fine." I got the corporate approval, and we paid him for it. However, that capital improvement is for a gymnasium floor in Goldfield, not Silver Peak. And all the residents of Silver Peak are up in arms over it, because they feel if the revenue is generated here, it should be spent here, or at least a good portion of it should be spent here. And I guess there's a special school-board meeting tonight for everybody to vent their frustrations and maybe burn me in effigy. [laughter]

It's interesting, because the school has always been a topic in this area—having a school, moving the school from four miles out of town into town . . .

Well, from what I understand, we have eight grades here, and we have two teachers. So we have first through fourth, and we have fifth through eighth. I don't know what the enrollment is, but it's very small. The high school students are bused to Tonopah.

To Tonopah, which isn't even in the same county.

No, it's in a different county. The county lines were drawn many years ago, and if you were to redraw the county lines today, they wouldn't be what they are.

Tonopah and Goldfield and Silver Peak would all be in Esmeralda County?

Well, geographically, it makes sense.

They're very interconnected in terms of medical and all kinds of services.

Well, and then how long has Nevada been a state? One hundred and thirty-some years, and that's probably when most of the counties were drawn. There's been some subdivisions, but Nevada used to be a rural state. The population was in rural Nevada. Nevada is now an urban state. The population is in basically two corners of the state. So we have 1.3 million people—I would guess probably about 1.1 million or greater in the two metropolitan areas.

And the rest is pretty unpopulated. So this is an interesting example of a new company coming into a town and finding themselves involved in a political situation.

Caught in the middle of the political whatever—it's definitely a situation. They'll work through it, and my opinion is I hope Silver Peak wins. I don't doubt that they need a new gym floor or whatever [in Goldfield], but they do need to take care of everybody, whether it's Goldfield or Silver Peak or Dyer, which is the other community [with a school in Esmeralda County]. Basically, there's only three areas in Esmeralda County. There's only about 1,500 or 1,600 people in the whole county.

Just in tracking the history, the school has always been something . . .

It's probably been an issue for one hundred years. [laughter] And it's not going to go away very quickly, is it?

At least not tonight, huh? [laughter] Let's talk a little bit about the projection for this project, which is about six years. Is that right?

That's correct. Well, six years of actively mining. OK, and then we have the leaching period—that is the mine life, plus the detoxification of the heaps, which is part of the reclamation. So start to finish, from today forward, we're probably looking between seven and eight years of some presence here in town. We'll get back to a very limited scale like it is today.

What things do you want to see this company leave behind for the town when you go?

I guess primarily it would be a good image. We don't want to appear to be like we just came in here and took the gold and left and didn't do anything. We want to be a good neighbor, an active neighbor, and just be part of the community.

What will the mountain look like when you leave?

Hopefully better. [laughter]

Really. Why?

It will have changes. We do have nine open pits. Hopefully, we'll have two or three more by the time it's finished, because we do have some active exploration. Of the nine open pits, the large one will definitely stay open, because it is started in year one, and it is the last one to be mined. Some of the smaller areas will be backfilled. This is actually cheaper for us, because it saves us some reclamation. There will still be required reclamation, but the amount of reclamation is less because we're containing it. The waste dumps will be regraded and seeded. The open pits will be burned. Access will be denied to make them safe for the general public when we're finished. But contours, the topography's going to change, but hopefully it will be equal or better than what it is today for multiple-use purposes.

OK, because, for example, there's an open pit there now at the Drinkwater, correct?

Yes.

And have any of these processes ever taken place in the past when mining happened up there, or have things just been left?

Things have just been left. We're either number six, number seven, or number eight [to work in this area]. There's been three major phases up until now. We're probably the fourth major phase, but there were several minor phases in there.

So do you end up actually cleaning up after some of the previous ones?

Oh, yes. We're going to be mining out a lot of the previous underground areas, and the one pit that you mentioned, that is our large pit. We are going to completely engulf that area. And the waste dump that is associated with it, which hasn't been seeded or reclaimed, will be reclaimed.

What about roads into that area? What's that going to be like?

Well, access up there is steep. We're improving the county road on the west access to the property, which is a much flatter terrain, because that is where we're going to have all our supplies delivered. It's easier to get equipment in, so we're spending about \$200,000 on that road right now, improving it. We're going to maintain it for all the years we're here, and then the maintenance will be turned back over to the county. In fact, the county might help us a little bit during, and in combination with us, it will be maintained very well. The access from this side is going to be much improved. It's very narrow, very steep, and some areas are dangerous—as you've seen. The roads will be widened. The grades will be much

more favorable. These will be roads that you can drive up in a two-wheel-drive car as opposed to the four-wheel-drive vehicles we were using today.

Oh, that's a big difference right there, because you couldn't get up in a two-wheel drive today, could you? It would be pretty hard. [laughter]

You can. There are some areas that you're going to spin your tires. You might get a flat tire, but you can get up in a two-wheel drive.

And those roads that you're talking about go to a major recreation area, is that correct? Does that go to Fish Lake Valley?

Yes, it does. However, there is a road to the south of town that also goes to Fish Lake Valley.

OK, so it's not the main way.

It's more for hunting and sightseeing, four-wheel-drive enthusiasts, things like that. And the actual project boundary will be restricted during our operation, and that's primarily for the public safety. But when we're finished, that area will be open again for public travel.

Has this town welcomed Mineral Ridge?

Until today. Maybe after the school-board [meeting tonight] they might not. [laughter] No, no, they've been very supportive of us. They can't wait for us to get started. It's the classic statement made of any small town, "There are going to be some jobs for our children." At least for the short period. It's the grandmothers wanting to keep their grandkids in town, at least for five years if nothing else.



THOMAS R. RINALDI
*Video Recording at the
 Gordon-Brodie Mine*

THOMAS R. RINALDI: With the mining that we're going to be doing today, a very extensive permitting process is required. Approximately twenty permits are required from the plan of operations that's filed with the federal government; water-pollution control standards with the state of Nevada; reclamation standards; our solution pond is required to be permitted; and fuel storage, explosives. Just a bunch of minor permits and three major permits, which I just mentioned, with the federal government and the state agencies.

VICTORIA FORD: *Tell me the difference, for example, between some of the things that they did at the E.L. Cord Mill that you wouldn't be allowed to do here, like the tailings that went down the mountain?*

Back in the 1930s and at the turn of the century there were no environmental regulations. It was more just, "How can we best process this material most economically and then get rid of our waste most economically?" Today, everything has to be governed by protecting groundwater, runoff water, the soils of the area: everything has to be protected. We have to have a plan up-front, prior to moving a ton of material, before the permits are in place, and then we're allowed to do it. Back in the 1930s when they were finished with the material, they found a low spot, and they just filled the basin or just let it run down the hill and got rid of it. Today we have to have engineered basins, we have to have flow sheets designed. Everything is planned up-front before we're ever allowed to do any work.

How long is this project going to last?

Total, this project will last about eight years. Actual mining and crushing will be between five and six years long, and then after that we will do the final leaching on the heaps to get the last bit of gold out, and then we have to rinse the heaps with fresh water to detoxify the remaining rock. And then after that, all the material that is here is resloped, contoured, topsoiled, and seeded.

So that you leave it looking different but natural again?

Yes. Actually, it falls into the multiple-use policy of the government agency here. The contours will change, but this area is primarily used for mining, recreation, and grazing. When we finish with the mining process here, we will turn it back so that it can be used for grazing and recreation. All the buildings we put in, all the concrete we put in, will be either buried or removed.

How many people do you plan to have working on this project?

In the initial days during construction and in the initial days of mining, we'll probably have somewhere between 110 and 120 people here. As everything gets complete and we settle down into the daily routine, we'll probably have about ninety employees.

When you talk about the permitting and the regulation process, about how much of your time does that take before you get started here? As general manager, can you just describe how that fits into your workload?

Right now, about half of my time is involved with the permitting process. After we get into operation and all the permits are in place, it will require . . . I'm going to say 10 percent of my time. But we do have one

person on staff who's sole responsibility is taking care of our land and our permits.

Can you tell me a little bit about how the decision was made to do open-pit mining here?

The decision for open-pit versus underground mining here is solely an economic decision. Today we have much larger machines, and it's much more cost effective to move material than it was back at the turn of the century or in the 1930s. Technology is continually improving, and with those improvements the cost of moving material goes down. Now, today as in the early days, we want to move the least amount of waste possible and primarily move ore. Back in the 1930s and the turn of the century, they probably moved five tons of ore for every ton of waste they mined. Now, today, we're going to be moving four tons of waste for every ton of ore we're mining. But we can move it at such a cost-effective rate compared to back in the 1930s, that it is still more cost-effective to have a large open pit than to try and mine it underground. Underground mining is still very expensive compared to open-pit methods.

Earlier today, Merle talked about how he didn't think that this mine was conducive to open pit. Can you talk about what the difference is between the technology and the thinking then and now?

Merle is thinking that as we mine this open pit that we're going to be taking it all at once. Now, with the assay techniques, the drilling techniques, the ore-control techniques, with the computers and things, we can actually be very selective, and we know exactly what is ore and what is waste. So it is actually a very selective mining method that we'll be using.

Because the perception is that open-pit mining is . . .

The public views it as big, and the equipment that we're using is large. The front-end loader we'll be using will handle twenty tons of ore in one scoop, and people just think of that as a tremendous amount of material. But those of us that are around it every day think of it as routine, and that's just a small portion of what we're going to be doing. For example, this morning Merle was saying they were moving up to 500 tons of ore per day. OK. We're going to be moving about 3,000 tons of ore per day, and total production with the pre-stripping and things, we will be able to move upwards of 30,000 tons of *material* per day. Of that 30,000 tons, 5,000 to 6,000, possibly 10,000 tons of that will be ore, depending on what day and where we're at in the different pits.

You talked about the public perception of mining. How does that impact your job?

Well, the mining industry definitely has a black eye with the American public. The environmental regulators and the different groups that are anti-mining have definitely done better PR work with the public than we have. One thing that they don't realize is that modern-day mining is very environmentally friendly. There is a social cost for maintaining the standard of living in this country, and mining is one of those costs, but we use a very small percentage of the land mass to do that. In the state of Nevada, which is a very highly mined state, less than one-tenth of one percent of all the land in the state since the first days of mining has ever been disturbed by mining.

Tell me, when you came into Silver Peak (and we're still talking about public perception), how were you greeted in Silver Peak?

Silver Peak is a very pro-mining town. It is a town that exists because of mining or minerals. It was started because of mining, and it is still a mining town today. Everybody in the town of Silver Peak is behind this project. They want it to go forward. They're looking forward to the jobs in the area, the people coming into the town—they're behind the project 100 percent.

Tell me about your first day on the job here.

It was busy. [laughter]

But you did something with the town.

Part of the permitting process, and on my first day of the job, was having a town meeting for our environmental assessment, which is the plan of operations that is required through the Bureau of Land Management. Luckily, there were other people. I wasn't the focus of the meeting. I got to sit and watch a little bit of it, but I definitely had to help out with the meeting.

Was that the first place that you could tell the reception that you were getting from the community, that it was positive?

Well, it was probably my first perception. The company as a whole knew the town was behind us long before that. Prior to that town meeting, other employees of the company were working with the different groups in town, whether it was the ambulance or the fire department. And the company's always been very supportive of them, and they've always been very supportive of the company.

How does the national economy affect what happens here?

Actually, this project is affected by the national economy in several ways. The

price of gold is very much important to us. The price of raw materials—fuel, cyanide, labor—are very important to the economics of this project, so we're very much part of the national economy.

And what about international? Does it extend that far in this particular project or not?

The international economy is somewhat dependent on this. Our parent corporation is a Canadian-based company, so we are an international corporation. Also, gold is sold on the international market. The United States is a net exporter of gold, which means that we produce more gold than we consume in this country on an annual basis, so by exporting gold it does help the economy with the balance of payments.

You described your parent company in Canada. And you also told me earlier this is a small corporation. Would you start with that statement and then describe what it is like working for a small corporation?

The parent corporation for Mineral Ridge Resources is Cornucopia Resources Limited. They're a Vancouver-based, junior mining company. We're a small mining company. This is our only operation at this point in time. We're doing exploration in other areas, and we do hope to have other mines operating in the next few years. It's a very nice company to be involved with. Total employees right now in North America are about twenty-five to thirty people. There are quite a few other people in Africa where we're doing some exploration right now. It's nice being in a small corporation like this, because everybody in the company is on a first-name basis with each other.

And how is that different from some of the larger corporations?

Well, I haven't worked for too many of the larger corporations, so I can only assume that it's a much more friendly environment here. You have contact with everybody in the company, not on a daily basis, but definitely on a monthly basis. Whereas in large corporations I would imagine some of the top executives, you never get to talk to, you never even get to meet.

And working for Mineral Ridge, what is your job like?

Being a small company, all of us here, whether it's me or anybody else, we have to wear many different hats, which depends on what day of the week it is. [laughter] My job—I'm involved with budgeting, permitting, people issues with the employees, production issues, construction issues, God . . . I'm sure there are others, but . . . [laughter]

Let's go back just a little bit, and tell me what your training has been, how you came up through the ranks, starting with your education.

I'm a mining engineer. My first job was as an underground foreman in a large copper mine in Arizona. After that, I came to Nevada to get into the gold business, because it was intriguing to me. I've worked as a foreman. I've worked as an engineer, and then I've gone into the superintendent and management positions.

You made a statement earlier that I would like to get on film which is that you hadn't planned to be in a desk job?

[laughter] Earlier Vikki and I talked about why I went into mining, and I told her that I went into mining because it was a nice outdoor job, and I didn't want to be stuck in

a building at a desk job. Now it appears that, about half of my job, I am. [laughter]

Is there more that we should get over the hill? What's going to be happening over there?

Behind the hill over there will be our water well, and there will be another pit over there. There's some equipment over there. (If you want to get a shot of some of the equipment, Mark, there's some equipment parked over there right now.)

One of the assets of this project going in here, in order to get the supplies that we need for the mining operation, there's twenty-six miles of county dirt road that we must improve to get our heavy equipment through. This is the main thoroughfare between Fish Lake Valley and Silver Peak in the county here. So we will be maintaining this road for the next five or six years, and when we leave, the road will stay in its improved condition.

Improved means what?

Right now the road receives minimal maintenance by the county. It probably averages about twenty foot in width. We will improve it to about a twenty-four-foot width with full drainage ditches on both sides.

Tom, can you describe to me what will be happening in this area [Oromonte] in a few weeks? How this is going to change?

Where we're standing is where the leach pad is going to go. We'll be crushing the ore, and this is where we will be stacking it to leach it with cyanide. Now, the building behind me that you can see, that will be torn down, and that will be where our solution pond is. Right next to it, on this side here, will be our processing facility. It will be our carbon plant and a gold refinery. There will also be an assay laboratory there, an

engineering building, and then over on this side of the valley here will be where our crushing plant is going to be. The run of mine ore will come in there, which will be nominal boulder-size materials down to fines, and then we'll crush it to approximately a one-eighth-inch-maximum size material. And then we will be filling this basin with the crushed ore where we will be leaching it with the cyanide solution.

So it is the same process as what we saw at the Cord Mill? It's still the cyanidation process?

It's still cyanidation, however, that was still the Merrill-Crowe system, which you

got the gold in solution and then you dropped it out on a zinc precip. Now here, we get the gold in solution, and then we run it through activated carbon in columns and then through electrowinning. We pull the gold out of solution that way. It's the next phase of technology.

Now, we will also be mining by open-pit methods. In fact, right over here on this hillside where you see those trees, that's where one of the pits is going to be. We will be mining a total of nine pits here. Of the nine pits, as part of our reclamation and construction activities, four will be back-filled, so we will be bringing the area back to somewhat of its original contours.

JANICE JOHNSON

JANICE (CHIATOVICH) JOHNSON found her childhood in Silver Peak filled with stark contrasts. On the one hand, she described a party town and her parents at the center of a social swirl of dances, potluck picnics, and progressive dinners. In fact, her childhood was one adventurous day after another. Overall, the party town was also a family town where a tomboy like Janice had the freedom to roam without harm. On the other hand, there were grim realities—children abandoned by parents, accidents in the mines, and alcoholism, all of which took a toll on her family.



JANICE JOHNSON: I was born Janice Gaye Chiatovich, the first of three daughters, to Stanley and Frances (Hill) Chiatovich in Tonopah, Nevada, in 1936. The sisters were Janice Gaye, Barbara Faye, and Jaci Rae, which is quite adorable. And we have cousins, Charlotte May and Frances Kay.

VICTORIA FORD: *[laughter]* OK. And so you were born in Tonopah. Were your parents living in Tonopah at the time?

Oh, no. No. You went to Tonopah to get born, if your mom was lucky enough to get there from Silver Peak, because that's where the doctors were. I call myself a Silver Peak native even though I wasn't dropped there. My dad was, however. My dad was born in Silver Peak. But I lived in Silver Peak until I was twelve. I did the last three years of high school in Gabbs. We moved to Gabbs in 1950. So with the exception of one year, Silver Peak was a town of my family. There were usually about thirty-two, thirty-three people there, and they were all uncles, cousins, et cetera. There was an occasional unrelated outsider. *[laughter]* But practically everybody . . . my playmates, of course, were my cousins. But in 1942, everyone, all the family men had to pick up and go where there was work, because the war shut down the mines. And so we, along with several of my cousins' families, moved to Reno for a year. And then we all moseyed back as fast as we could.

Were there jobs again for the men?



"The sisters were Janice Gaye, Barbara Faye, and Jaci Rae, which is quite adorable." 1 to r: Jaci, Janice, and Barbara Chiatovich with kittens.

Well, the guys decided to go mining on their own. Until that time, when I was born my father was the general manager of the Mary Mine, and he was living high on the hog. He was very important, and it was just wonderful. Those were *big times*. They traveled by airplane. They had a baseball team that actually traveled, and one time we traveled to Los Angeles by airplane, the team did. How they finagled that, I have no idea.

But anyway, they were a very, very exciting bunch. All of the fun happened when I was a child. Poor Barbie and Jaci, when they came along four and six years later, the mining business was depressed, and the fun really pretty much came to a screeching halt. During the boom time there might have been what, like two thousand people or something in the later 1930s when the Mary Mine was really going and the Black Mammoth. I mean, it was a real growing town, and it was a party town. One thing they used to do when I was a baby

child, they used to have progressive dinners. Children were far and few between actually. I was kind of a rarity. My cousin, Susie, and I were pretty much the only infant-type children around, and so we used to be hauled around from house to house to house on these progressive dinners. I was told that one of them lasted three days, and I'm not surprised, because I can remember waking up on one person's bed, and the next time I woke up I was on somebody else's bed! [laughter] It was great. But they were real party people.

We recently read my mom's diary, which we did not know existed until she died. She left it out very carefully, so we know that she wanted us to read it. But I want to tell you, she hated being interrupted in her partying to have a baby! [laughter] It changed everything! And that was a very big surprise to us. But it was a big-time party, and a lot of it revolved around baseball games and, of course, Fourth of July celebrations—huge . . . We had the big fight with Max Baer, an underground barbecue.

Underground—meaning the barbecue pit was dug down into the ground?

Yes, the pit barbecue and parades. I have pictures of Daddy and uncles and cousins and so forth looking like drugstore cowboys. They were real cowboys, but they dressed up like drugstore cowboys for parades! [laughter] It was an *exciting* time. I'm glad they were able to have it, because it did come to a screeching halt with the advent of World War II.

So those years from the time you were born until World War II, which is about six years . . . although you were just a real small child, you can remember the fun?

Oh, it was excitement. And, of course, I was a little princess, because there were no

children, just my cousin Susie and I. We eventually got our cousin Pete in about 1939. He was Pete Shirley, Louis Shirley's son, and his mother died in birth. He was brought up by Baba Shirley, his grandmother. So there were the three of us, so we were very special. [laughter] I mean, it seemed like the world was our oyster! But then, as they say, all those things come to an end.

You've mentioned several things that I'd like to hear more about. One is the baseball games. Tell me where they were held and what you remember.

Well, we always called it the ballpark when I grew up. It was adjacent to the powerhouse and all surrounded by tamaracks. I think maybe other people call them tamarisk—I guess that's the same. It was like a large pasture. It had salt grass. Obviously, they had a backstop, and that was the baseball field. It seems to me that they might have also played out on the flat one time or another.

Do you remember going down there with your mom to watch the game?

Oh, indeed, yes. There were some places where you could bring the car up close enough so that you could sit in the car or on the car.

There were no bleachers?

No, I don't recall that. People probably dragged a folding chair or something. I remember going to Mina for them to play against Mina. In Mina they played on a salt flat between Mina and Luning. They went to Tonopah and also played in Goldfield, of course.

So they traveled all around. And was the team all men or was it coed?

No, they were all men or all women. They had a girls' team. (I think we have pictures of that.) Wilma Hill and my cousin, Gerry Hill, were on that. And Jim Morris, the trucker, his wife Kathleen was on it. They won a state championship, and the guys always admitted that the girls were better than they were. I guess they were a real hot team! [laughter] My cousin Susie was not much of an athlete . . . or interested I should say. She was a horsewoman. But my cousin Pete and I became very good baseball players. We were the team pretty much. [laughter] But that was the big deal.

And you talked about your dad's team getting in an airplane and flying to Los Angeles to play. Were you allowed to go, too?

I went on that trip.

And where did the plane take off?

Oh, oh, the flat. The airplane might have belonged to the Black Mammoth Corporation. I know that Hugh Cameron always had a plane, but I don't think that was involved with these trips. One day I was out in the backyard playing, and I watched this little single-engine plane spiraling toward the ground, and it landed propeller first in the tailings pond up at the south end of town. It was Hugh and my Uncle Bob, and I watched them get out and walk away. [laughter] My Uncle Bob had a cut on his head, and that was it.

That's amazing! Airplanes were still fairly new in the 1930s so travel . . .

Oh, absolutely. Oh, and Vollmar . . . of course, Fred Vollmar was a very big deal. He was the tycoon; he was the Silver Peak tycoon-type guy. I suppose he's the one that probably financed Hugh Cameron, who was his nephew—probably kept him in airplanes

and flying regalia to get him around, because he went back and forth between Los Angeles and Silver Peak. There was a hangar on the edge of the airport or on the edge of the salt flat at the north end of town as you enter, on the other side of one of the three rock hills in the middle of town. That was apparently a fairly firm part of the marsh. There were many places in the marsh that you wouldn't try to land unless you could go down and put your feet on it first. We always had a windsock out. It was a regular hangar, and Jimmy Morris had a shop there. Well, he fixed not only trucks but also the airplanes. Yes, it is amazing; the industry was so young that I guess they were rather daring.

And that had to be exciting for you.

Oh, it was very exciting! It really was. Later on in my life my husband became a pilot, and we landed there for somebody's funeral. We landed on the marsh, and I found it more exciting than I really cared to. [laughter] The place that we were supposed to land was poorly marked, and our approach just didn't give us It was very iffy, that's all I can say. It was a very, I-hope-this-works-type deal. And happily it did.

It must have given you a sense though, as an adult, of what flying was like in earlier years.

Oh, exactly. They were a bunch of warriors. Yes, very much so. Later on they used to have the mustanging expeditions that used the airplanes up there on the edges of the hills surrounding the marsh, and those guys were like bush pilots.

And so mustanging meant what?

On the Goldfield side of the marsh, up against the hills, they would build fences and herd the mustangs from the foothills into these chutes with the airplanes. They

would scare them in other words. They would scare them along with the airplanes. And they'd fix these things up in a box canyon, and the horses would be run into this makeshift corral, and then they were hauled out for dog food or whatever it was they did. It wasn't a pretty thing.

So it wasn't to break them and use them or anything. It was to sell them?

Apparently. People occasionally came to look them over, maybe to see if there might be any kind of good stock mixed in there. My Uncle Pat bought me a little mustang colt once that was wonderful, but the mustang stock out there was very scrubby.

So you had a little mustang colt as a child?

Yes. As I mentioned before, my cousin, Sue Humphrey, was a phenomenal horse-woman. Her dad was a horseman. The three cousins had a corporation—Harvey Humphrey, Stanley Chiatovich, Ernest Shirley. They formed a corporation for their mining endeavor. This is what they did when they came home from Reno in order to try to make a living for themselves.

So this was after the war had started?

Yes, this was after the big mines were gone, and they were trying to put together The big interests were gone. They decided to start to run some cattle, and Harvey Humphrey would be in charge of the cattle because he was a horse person. My dad was a miner, obviously; and Ernie Shirley, his cousin, was also a miner. They were the three major holders, and then they took care of various people on the side, like another cousin, Louis, and Baba, who was Louis and Ernie's mother and my dad's aunt. Anyway, they had mining operations and the cattle operations.

And was it the same corporation then that also owned the stores that the women worked at?

That is correct.

OK. So the corporation had all of those different aspects?

Yes. Yes, I don't know how long after the women decided to do . . . had to be after the store closed. The store used to be called the Northern Supply Company and was owned by Lindsay and Gordon Smith before they moved to Gabbs.

And then it had closed, and then the three women reopened it?

Yes. Yes. Part of it. There was a movie theater on one end, and I never could get them to open the movie theater for me. [laughter] There'd been a hardware store. Anyway, they opened the bar, grocery store, and the post office, and the three ladies took shifts running them. Then, of course, in 1947 or 1948 it burned.

Do you remember that?

Oh, boy, do we remember that! It was absolute . . . Well, it was just a conflagration. I can remember looking out my kitchen window. Gee, isn't that funny? For some reason or other I don't think Mother was home. I saw there was a fire down there. It was early in the morning. I used to babysit my younger sisters while my mother worked—my mother never worked the bar at night, and the bar, of course, was the only part that was open at night. The guys took those shifts over, because my mother had small children. Nobody else did. I babysat during the day while Mother was working. I ran out our back steps, which were long and kind of steep, down toward Ruby and Ernie Shirley's house screaming at the top of my

lungs, "Fire! Fire! Fire!" And nobody was home. So I went on to the power company and screamed . . . My cousin, Gene Boyd, was the power company guy. And it's funny I have that hole in that story. I can't remember where those adults were.

Were they already at the fire?

Well, it could be, but my mother wouldn't just leave me. Unless maybe my mother spotted it and told me to run and tell people. Anyway, the power station is where the telephone was, so maybe that's what I [was] supposed to do. I went down to Gene's. It was the only telephone, and the only place he would be calling would be Goldfield or Tonopah. He got on the phone and told Tonopah (he probably looked over the situation first) that we needed any help anybody could send.

Directly across the street from this complex, which was the store-bar-post office, former hardware store, and movie house—that was exactly like today's strip malls—was a large garage with a living apartment above it. Jimmy and Kathleen Morris happened to live in it at the time of the fire. They had just had a baby. And there was no problem with saving the people, of course, but it was important to the men to get the couch out of this upstairs apartment. It was just a cute, little, attic apartment, and there was a little porch outside and long stairs, very narrow. And later on they established that the couch could not fit through that door, and yet they got it out the door! [laughter] Of course, losing a couch was no big deal, but it was very important to them at the time, and they got it out.

I guess that garage didn't burn, but the whole rest of everything did. We had a two-room, walk-in icebox in the store. Because we had cattle, we slaughtered cows, and we had whole carcasses, et cetera. And because we were quite a ways away from civilization, we had crates and bags—large stores of

things. Anyway, the one thing that remained with us forever was the smell of the cooking eggs and ham, and I suppose whatever else meat was in there. And those thick pieces of wood—you could imagine what a wonderful barbecue that was. Pete and I went through the ashes and pulled out the scorched eggs. It was quite an adventure, of course. It was not left standing. It was ashes. They sent help out from Tonopah. It took a little while, but by that time there was nothing anybody could do. That night of the fire, when everything was gone . . . people had come from everywhere—from Hawthorne and Goldfield—people that wanted to help and people who just wanted to look. And airplanes.

We had an old house that we occasionally used on Sundays when it was too cold to have a potluck. We always had a Sunday potluck, usually out on the salt flats at Coyote Knolls. But when it was cold or inclement, we had it in this building that had formerly been a residence and a beauty shop and so forth. It was next to Papa Shirley's bar in the corner. Anyway, all of the ladies and all of the people from other towns brought food in. We must have had a very large potluck that night. I can remember people being at our potluck that we didn't even know.

It was kind of very eye opening to us. Very exciting. Well, I mean, a fire like that makes your blood run cold but the excitement is just too much. My little sister Jaci wanted to run away. [laughter] She was very afraid. And all the children were herded into my backyard, because it was far enough to be out of harm's way, but we could see. I can remember seeing a barrel go way up into the air and exploding—oil barrels I would assume.

Did you have any sense of it being a catastrophe for the adults?

Indeed. Absolutely. First of all they had to regroup for the post office immediately. There was nothing salvageable. Nothing was salvaged. I can't tell you whether they were well covered by insurance. If they weren't, they lost everything. They weren't a very going concern in the first place, although they were listed in Dunn and Bradstreet. That was one of the proudest . . . My father was very proud when he got word that they had been listed in Dunn and Bradstreet. I thought that meant he was rich. Far from it. It probably meant he wrote a letter. [laughter] But it was a very big deal to him. It meant he was legitimate.

I can remember my dad and Harvey working over their books. I know it was bad. See, they had three businesses, and one business was suddenly gone. You know, I don't know how they pulled out of it. They did. Nobody lost their house or had to sell their car or anything, but they didn't have a lot other than that anyway. And for the town—the grocery store, which was more like a quick stop, was gone along with the bar, which was a social center, and the post office, which would also be a social center. We had a jukebox in the bar, which you could just reach around the back and click it—you didn't have to put money in it. Wonderful. [laughter] We didn't have a movie, but we had a jukebox.

While the Mary Mine was in full . . . and not just the Mary Mine, but Nivloc and everything else, those guys were in full swing and the town was in booming stance, as we called it. The Black Mammoth was kind of a strip mall itself. And that physical building still stands. That's where a bar-restaurant is now. At that time it was a large restaurant. I guess that's where the bar was, too. And Ma Curran, who also had the hot springs down at the other end of town (Ma and Pop Curran), was the cook. And that was the Black Mammoth Cafe and Black Mammoth bar. When the mines shut down in 1942, that went with it. Then the town

was nothing. Then most everybody moved away, because there was nothing for them.

Can you describe the house where you grew up?

Yes. My mother and dad were married in 1934. When they knew that they were going to start a family, they asked my uncle, John Chiatovich, to build them a house. He wasn't busy at the moment, so he decided to build them a house. And it was situated on Main Street and across the street from where the schools eventually were. It was really quite large, physically. It didn't have a lot of rooms, but it was kind of large, and it was kind of a great big box. And, of course, it had no bathroom, but we didn't have running water. When it was built, my mother's dearest dream (having been brought up with dirt floors and on the mountaintops) was to have an inside bathroom. So when the house was built, this particular little area that looked like a large closet (and she used it as a closet) was built as the future bathroom. [laughter] It was always called the bathroom, even though it was mostly a closet. And there was a master bedroom, living room and dining room open to each other, separated by my favorite place in the house, the bookshelves. I would imagine they were a little, what do you call it? Modish. They were very modern at the time when they were built. I think my mother really thought she'd done a great thing—a little bit of architecture there.

What kinds of books did you have?

My Aunt Gerry Hill always gave books for birthdays—adults and children alike—and my father and mother always belonged to a book-of-the-month club. They were both big readers. I am wont to say I educated myself! [laughter] And I started reading very grown-up books at a very tender age, and I just was fascinated. These bookcases

had glass doors, and it was just a magic place to me. It was like having my very own library before Silver Peak had a library. Zane Grey, of course, was one of my dad's favorites, but my dad was also a deep reader. *Les Misérables* happened to be his favorite book, and that always impressed me greatly. *Drums Along the Mohawk*—I saw that in an antique store the other day, and I hope I have it somewhere at home. It's my dad's . . . somewhere at home because I can remember it vividly, the orange and green flame-colored cover. It was a nice existence with two intelligent parents who made books available to me, where otherwise it may have been very difficult, because there was no store or library to go to.

I was also very much into taking what I pleased from the school cloakroom! [laughter] Well, my first favorite . . . It wasn't very sophisticated. I fell in love with *Raggedy Ann*. And I now have first editions of most of the *Raggedy Anns*, but they didn't come from the Silver Peak cloakroom. [laughter] I would go back in the cloakroom, and, well, I was supposed to be doing something else, but I would just sit back there and read. I was very generous with the cloakroom books with myself.

So you'd bring them home?

Oh, yes. Well, they belonged to me as far as I was concerned. [laughter] My cousin Susie read *The Earth is the Lord's* and *Genghis Khan*, and I thought she was so . . . Of course, she was two and a half years older, and she was a little bit smarter than I most of the time. I just decided, "Boy, she can read *The Earth is the Lord's*, I can read those big books, too." So I started getting into big books.

Also, the kitchen was large! The kitchen was as large as the living room, unlike kitchens of today. Of course, it had to have the dinner table, but it was only used for big-deal stuff—for company and holidays. We

had a big electric stove with a sunken soup pot. It was so handy. I can't believe they don't still do it. It was a really nice deal. And Mother cooked a lot with the pressure cooker, and it exploded every now and then and plastered the ceiling.

She and the ladies of the town, I suppose it was just once a year, all got together and made a big batch of raviolis—all working together. They really made it a big deal, and then we'd have a ravioli feed. Anyway, that's one of the things that went on in the kitchen. No running water, but it had a sink. We had water. The well was about fifteen feet, maybe twenty feet outside the kitchen window, and we did have cold water piped into the kitchen, but we never quite got it to the bathroom until the summer before we moved to Gabbs. It was something that my mother was going to have done, and dadgummit, she did it.

On one side of their house was Papa Shirley's bar, which was long closed by that time. And the back end of Papa Shirley's bar, which they used to call the American Legion part, is where they set up a kindergarten one year. It didn't last very long, but there would be dances and things there, various kinds of gatherings.

So it was kind of a community center and school and everything?

It was, at times, yes. It must have been moved away. They moved a lot of buildings away. It didn't burn.

Now behind our house, we had a huge yard. I mean huge. It was eventually chain-linked to a smaller size, but before that the area was probably two city blocks large. Part of my backyard was the middle hill—my hill. Susie had a hill, and I had a hill. There was a cave in it, and it was a great running-up-and-down-type hill. My cousin Pete and I, part of our life was running up and down that hill. And now they have a fence right up the middle of the hill and a television

antenna on it, and it's hurtful—very hurtful what they've done to my town.

There's also a television antenna on Susie's hill. They drained the reservoir—that was our swimming hole. It had nice, fresh, deep water. Every spring the guys would buy blue stone and blue stone the moss out, because the moss grew fairly thick. Blue stone was a moss killer. It was deep turquoise crystals, and it killed the fish, so for the first couple of weeks after they did it we couldn't go swimming, because there were dead fish floating all around. We just *hated* that part of it, because we could not go near the water, and it was very vile.

There had been a mill down there also that I never knew to work. It was older than I. And, of course, the reservoir went under the road to the little pond on the other side, and the little pond is where the little children played. It was a perfect children's pond. And then that ran out into what we called the lake and the tules. Silver Peak never got very much winter, but in a real good winter with a few good freezes it was an ice-skater's haven, unless the wind was blowing when it was freezing. It was just wonderful, because it was a large body of water. For the first several years I used my dad's ice skates with socks rolled up in the middle, and I was a terrible ice skater. I never could hold my ankles up. But I got a pair of my very own skates for Christmas one year. Pete and I used to try to skate on our bikes—well, ride on the ice with our bikes.

Pete and I were real good pals, and I was very much of a tomboy. One of the big games of the winter was to see how far out you could go without falling in, because it very seldom really, really froze over solid. This is up near a salt flat, so I'm sure that slows down the freezing factor. Below us on the hill (on my hill) was Ruby and Ernie Shirley. They lived in the house that Ruby still lives in. I can't recall if I ever knew who

built it. The Humphrey's home was built by my grandfather, Frank Hill. I think he built it for himself. And then Susie's was on the same street as theirs, across the street from the other hill.

Were you able to go and visit your friends? Pete and Susie.

Oh, it was open house at all times. That's the way that we lived. We lived with each other. Susie was older and less inclined to be a goofball. Pete and I were just very athletic. We rode bikes, or she rode her horse, and we took on the mountains and the salt flat. One time we decided we saw a plane crash on the other side of the salt flat, and we were going to find it (didn't bother to tell anybody) on our bicycles. Well, it finally got so marshy we had to push our bicycles because we couldn't ride them. And the sun went down, and we knew we were in trouble. Never found the plane, and never heard about the plane that crashed either.

[laughter] Did somebody come find you?

They could see us coming up. They knew we were coming.

And were you in trouble?

Of course.

What happened when you were in trouble?

Well, I got spanked with a fly swatter. Nobody else did in my family. My mother was the fly swatter spanker. The other children were just reprimanded. My sisters were also spanked, but my cousins were only reprimanded. My mother was very strict but very sweet.

Did you go to school at all in Silver Peak?

Oh, indeed. All of my grade school was in Silver Peak. School was always there. Kindergarten wasn't. They had three buildings of school going during the big time, during the mid- and late-1930s. One separate for a high school. One, I guess, was probably for first and second grade. It was kind of a small little building that eventually became the residence for the teacher. And the big building in the middle, the big white one in the middle, it was for whatever grades were left—from third through eighth. Oh, no, excuse me. There were four buildings. Anyway, the high school was the one at the end. I went to school in both of the two middle ones at one time or another. We all sat in the same room—same teacher, same room—and there were usually eight of us.

All related? Because it was mostly cousins?

Actually, there were only the three of us cousins, and then when my sisters finally got in, there were the five of us cousins. Until the Hills moved to Yerington, my cousin Dorothy was also there. See, that was mostly cousins, but there was always someone there that wasn't a cousin that was connected with the powerhouse sub-station. Those kids were always younger. The Saunders, and the Saunders are Bud and Gladys Saunders's children—Buddy, Leonard, and Roberta. And Roberta lives in Reno. She turned into a lovely girl. And the two boys, Buddy and Leonard, *terrorized* me. They were a good four years younger, but they terrorized me, because they would pull the legs off of frogs and cut open lizards, and I thought I just couldn't stay in the same place, because I just was sick to my stomach all the time. I suppose they're nice boys now! *[laughter]* I was actually afraid of them. But they were there for a good deal of my grade-school years. And the Manzers, Shelley Manzer and his family were there, not at the same time.

Who was your teacher?

They didn't stay very long, and we usually got the dregs, which is why I say I educated myself. Susie started school while the boom was still on, and Anne Tomany was probably everybody's favorite teacher. She was there when there were four buildings going, and she was in the little building with . . . it might have been kindergarten. And after this experiment with the kindergarten, after it closed, I was so crushed, because I knew I was ready to go to school and read and write and everything. Anne Tomany allowed me to come to school maybe three times a week and spend a couple hours. I thought that was very lucky because she was so special. And then the bottom fell out for mining, and Anne Tomany moved away. And then we had a Miss Callings from Missouri. She came out to Nevada to get a divorce, and I loved her to pieces. She is probably the first one that jumps into my mind when I am asked about favorite teachers. She was a card, is what she was. She was kind of a party-girl card. She used to sit down at the Black Mammoth coffee shop, in the restaurant with guys all around her, and she was always making them laugh, and I thought, "Oh, she is so cool." [laughter] Cecilia Callings—she only lasted a year. She was my third- or fourth-grade teacher.

Mrs. Norris came over from Dyer, Nevada, at the south end of Fish Lake Valley. Her husband, I think, had the post office and did various things there. Mrs. Norris had the county fix up that little first-grade house into a teacherage where she lived during the week. It was very comfortable and very cozy. (My mother was on the school board at that time, and Mom did a good job.) She stayed possibly for three years, maybe longer She was there when I graduated eighth grade.

I went to school in Silver Peak only seven years, because by the time I had

reached the seventh year of schooling, I had been sitting in the same room with older kids and had heard that Nevada history book probably seven times inside and out. I guess it was Mrs. Norris who decided to talk to the state superintendent and ask if I could be tested and go on to high school, because she felt I was physically mature. She felt that I was ready to go, so I left. I didn't go to eighth grade. I just went on to Tonopah, boarded with a cousin in Tonopah, and went on to high school at the tender age of not quite twelve.

What was that like to go away from home when you were still a child?

Well, there were boys. I had never been around boys. My boy cousin was just my brother. I was terribly boy crazy, and that was just the most exciting thing that could ever happen. I was boarding with my cousin Susie, who had been there a year. Now she was only one year ahead of me, and her boyfriends'd come out in cars! I had gone to a couple of dances before I went to school over there, and I got to stay with the Cavanaugh's. Oh, it was very exciting! I mean, I had moved to the city. Moved to the city! [laughter]

It was very hard for me to move. I always seemed to be leaving my family once that started, and that was hard. I was really just a baby, and I did miss them terribly. I needed my mother's guidance, because I wanted to be wild and crazy, and my mother would have been a very much needed stabilizer for me. I wasn't a bad girl, thank goodness, but I had just gotten out of hand. And at the end of that year, I think my mother had probably suffered as much as I did from my absence. It's hard to give up a baby.

At this time my dad was looking around for something more lucrative. He had an offer to look into a tungsten mine at Gabbs, and it looked like somebody was willing to pay him a salary. That was nothing to sniff

at. He found a pumice mine, and he was able to make a small pittance from the pumice mine, just a pittance here and a pittance there. Anyway, so we moved to Gabbs, and, of course, that meant I had to leave Tonopah. And I was in love—I just didn't want to leave Tonopah, because it was the most exciting thing I'd ever done. Not only that, we moved to Broken Hills, which is just a mine about thirty miles outside of town. We had to travel in to school every day. And as soon as school wasn't going, I was all alone at a mine again. It was pretty awful, but I lived through it. Out there we didn't even have electricity. We did our studying by kerosene lamp and ironed from the wood stove. In Silver Peak, of course, we always had electricity. In the summertime, when we went to various mines because school was out, oftentimes we just had dirt floors and no electricity.

So you traveled around with your dad who was working at different mines in the summers?

Yes, if he had something going somewhere. Sometimes he'd get a contract in order to get so many tons out of such-and-such a place.

So he would be a leaser.

Yes. That's exactly what he did. He and my Grandfather Hill worked together very often. And if it was summertime, of course, we would join him. We lived in Goldfield one time that way, too.

Tell me a little bit about your dad. Was he the superintendent at the Mary Mine when you were born?

Right. My dad lost his mother when he was nine, and he was the oldest of five. They were just kind of pushed around from one aunt or cousin to whatever, because their

father was sort of footloose. He just wasn't interested in a family.

My dad always tried to keep his brothers and sisters together. They were two years apart each. Bob was just a baby when she [Nellie] died. One of Dad's most vivid memories was his mother being sick in the bedroom in Ruby Shirley's present home. That's where he lived—he and Pat and Jack, two of his younger brothers. At the time they were rolling tires down the hill and having them bounce up against the house, and then retrieving them and doing it again. His Aunt Baba—he called her Aunt Annie, who was Nellie's (Daddy's mom's) sister came out at least three times telling them that their mother was sick, please stop, that was bothering them. And they didn't stop. It haunted him all of his life.

Anyway, [after their mother died] they tried to spend summers on the ranch, but the kids were pretty much split up. Jack and Dad, the two oldest, would pretty much go wherever they were being sent, and Pat pretty much stayed on the ranch. An aunt took Bob and Marjorie, who were the two youngest—that was Lillian McCloskey, Chiatovich-McCloskey. So they had a fairly stable upbringing, because she was a lovely, lovely, loving person.

Eventually, when it came to high school, Daddy came to Tonopah and boarded with Mrs. Cavanaugh, John Cavanaugh Sr.'s mother. His father had the mortuary, and the mother had a boardinghouse. He and John Chiatovich had been best friends since childhood. (I have a wonderful picture of them on horseback. It's really good.) He spent the four years in Tonopah absolutely It was stable, and it was home, and he loved it. He shone, and he won an appointment to West Point, but that summer he lost an eye while chopping wood and for about two years they fought to save it, and he had many, many operations. I think the story is he had his twenty-first operation on his twenty-first birthday. They

couldn't save it, so he had one blind eye. And he would not have lasted [laughter] He'd have thought West Point was the most foreign country and the military the most foreign service in the world. I can't think of anything that my father was less like than military.

He was not a regimented person?

Absolutely not. He was a miner. He loved mining. He was, I guess, a master miner. I've heard that from young geologists who used to come and follow him around. He just knew what he was doing. They said that he could follow a vein in a stope blindfolded, and I guess sometimes it practically was like he was blindfolded. But anyway, he immediately started mining instead of going to West Point.

Airplanes played a large part in Silver Peak when I was small. A little later, during the war and after we came back from Reno in about 1943, the air force base in Tonopah was in full swing. And one of those flyers, of course, was Chuck Yeager, the most hotshot flyer. He, among others, used to come out to Silver Peak and do what they were absolutely forbidden to do, and that was buzz the hills—buzz my hills. It was just very exciting. [laughter] It was very illegal, and it was very dangerous; but they did it, and I looked forward to it. He also buzzed the water towers in various places. We didn't have a water tower Well, we didn't have water in our water tower. He buzzed the one at Mina, and it blew apart. [laughter] He got in trouble for that, too. Anyway, they were constantly being told, "You absolutely must not do this. This is dangerous."

One time my cousin Dorthella Hill, Elwood Hill's wife, was going for a doctor's appointment with her two children, Kathy and Elwood Jr. And they were going toward Tonopah, still on the Silver Peak highway. They had just passed the volcano, and Kathy and Elwood Jr. were in the back seat. One of

the children said, "Mom, why do airplanes fly on the street?"

And she said, "Oh, don't be silly. Airplanes don't fly on the street."

And Elwood Jr. said, "Mom, this airplane is flying on the street." This airplane had been going to buzz them and lost power, and he crashed on top of them. She saw what was going to happen. She was able to push the children down onto the floor. She was badly hurt but the children weren't. She was in the hospital for quite a long while, and that was the turning point—there were no more buzzings with the airplanes.

Let's go back to your father. You said he would have graduated what year?

It would have been 1927 or 1928. And he went on into mining. I have no idea what the particular projects were at the time. I know they went out to Montezuma. It wasn't time for Argentite. After Shirley, Chiatovich, and Humphrey incorporated, they started working on the Argentite [claim] trying to get it put together.

Which would have been later, after the 1940s?

Right after the war, yes.

So he kind of worked himself up through [the] ranks. Is that how he learned?

Yes, obviously so. Well, as a matter of fact, fairly soon after high school he must have started working at the Mary Mine, because in my mother's diary before they were married she said, "My hon came down from the hill to visit. I fixed a cake for my hon, because he came down from the hill." So the miners lived up there in a bunkhouse, up at the Mary Mine. He might have worked there for as long as five years or so before he worked his way into the superintendent's job. But it was kind of a big

deal, I would imagine, because he was a young man about twenty-five years old, and it was a big operation.

What was it like for you as a youngster? Was your dad home at nights? Was he gone a lot?

It was very hard, because I understood how hard he worked. I was just old enough to know that they struggled terribly. There were three of us children, and everybody else only had one child. I knew that things were really difficult financially, very difficult financially. He left before I ever woke up in the morning and came back after dark most of the time.

When they were working Argentite they had to come across the flats where the sand hills are, which is an invitation for being stuck at all times or the car would break down. They would all try to go in one car, generally in Daddy's old pickup. So if they weren't home by a certain time the women were supposed to come looking for them. Of course, that could be like eight o'clock at night. [laughter] And if they were within sight or if they were across the flats, they would start a bonfire so that we would know, "Come get us." Otherwise, we just had to go out looking for them. We had a couple of real bad winters (I don't think it was very often). When the guys would come home they had to be dead tired, but they'd have to dig up each other's pipelines and unfreeze them to get water. They worked terribly hard.

So you didn't see your dad much?

No. No.

Was he tired? Was he cranky? Was he dirty when he came home?

He was very self-conscious of his hands, because he could never get them clean, and they were cracked and gnarled. He had

hands like me, big—big, rough hands. But he couldn't get them clean when he put on a nice white shirt, so he always tried to keep them hidden. He had gorgeous teeth, and women fell in love with him, always, from the time he was fourteen years old. His teachers were in love with him. Everyone was in love with him. He was very handsome and wonderful and charming and funny and sweet, but he was no disciplinarian. He loved us, but we were just his playtime people.

So he'd come home and play with you, if you were still awake?

Yes. Yes, after work. He'd read to us until he went to sleep, which was pretty quick. [laughter] He was very dear and very loving.

But Mom was the disciplinarian?

Oh, absolutely. She was in charge of him, too. He was a much beloved man, very much beloved, by anyone that came into contact with him. He continued to take care of his younger siblings his entire life. Most of them were in trouble at one time or another—often, and he would dig them out.

What kinds of trouble?

My Uncle Bob was oftentimes in trouble with the law, because he was a smooth talker, and he sold land that he didn't own and forged checks, very often in my dad's name. He was, of course, a ladies' man. Very handsome and much beloved by women, and I loved him to pieces. And Uncle Jack just was a heavy-drinking cowboy and would get lost and have to be brought home and bailed out and whatever. My uncle Pat was just a little lost.

But my dad was always the one that they could go to. Until my aunt died, Daddy also took care of her. He was the head of the family when he was nine years old, when his

mother died. He cared about keeping the family together, which he couldn't do. When they lost their mom, their family fell apart. I don't know how much longer it might have stayed, you know, how much longer it would have held together anyway. Now his Aunt Annie (Baba Shirley) had six children of her own, and she started having them when she was a teenager. So she did what she could. But let's face it, her hands were full. I think Papa Shirley probably made a pretty nice living. He was a bar owner.

Anyway, so Daddy was just . . . Mining was his life. He dreamed it and ate it and drank it. And he was going to find that gold mine. They're such gamblers. Well, he married the right woman, because my mother was a very strong person. Neither of them had anyone to learn from. Neither of them had a home. My mother was actually deserted by her mother. Her father, whom she adored completely, eventually got her. The place where her mother left her . . . finally sent her on a train to Blair Junction with her name on her shoulder. She was six years old, and she waited there until her dad heard from somebody that she was there waiting for him to come get her. From then on he just dragged her around with him—not exactly a nice existence. He was a heavy drinker also, but they were devoted to each other. Her life was taking care of him, not him doing much for her. He bought her a diamond ring and made sure she had pretty dresses, but she sat outside in the truck waiting for him to come out of the bar, and she'd drive him home when she was eleven years old.

So neither of my parents had a pattern for a family. And yet, they were two individuals that knew exactly what they wanted to do. They wanted to have a good, stable family. And how they did it so well, I will never know. My dad decided he didn't know anything, but he decided, "Frances'll figure it out."

He left it up to her?

Oh, absolutely. I'd say everything from finances to children to anything that's going to happen. And she took care of him very well.

My mother's father, my grandad, Frank Hill, was a phenomenally . . . he was the most outlandish, eccentric character, and I loved him to pieces. He was so cool.

In what ways was he eccentric?

He was a hoist man. He was a master mechanic. If something didn't work, and he didn't have the part, he would invent it and/or make it—as did his brother, Fayette Hill, my Uncle Fayette. They had genius mechanical skills. Anyway, but Grandpa Frank would go off on a three-month binge, just disappear. We'd always find out where he was, because somebody'd call and say, "This is where he is." And we'd go get him.

He would buy a pair of khaki clothes—khaki shirt, khaki pants—and put them on. Mother would scrub him with a wire brush if she had one! Those clothes stayed on him until they wore out. He slept in them. He always had a trailer house, a really small trailer house—just one of those little rounded things. They weren't furnished like they are today. He'd just drop on the bed and sleep with his cigarette between his fingers (why he never burned himself up . . . he did burn a hotel down once) and with the radio on. The radio never was turned off, and his clothes never came off. But he always had coins in his pockets, and when any kids were around he'd reach into his pockets and throw them, and the kids'd scramble for them.

He was very gruff—pretended like he didn't like anything, anybody, and he was just mean. And he used to go, "Who-ah-ha-he-ha!" [a deep, scary laugh] to the little children, and my two sisters were terrified! I thought it was the funniest thing in the

world. Oh, they were such sissies. They seemed so much younger than I was. Anyway, he and I were great pals. He decided when I was about six years old that every woman in his family needed a diamond ring. He bought my mother a diamond ring when she was maybe ten, and he was going to buy me a diamond ring. So he had my mother get out the catalog and find the ring, and he gave her the money. I got a tiny little thing, and I just gave it to my daughter for one of her daughters. And then maybe two, three years later he decided it should be a *bigger* ring. So naturally, Barbara inherited my little one, and I got a little bigger one. And by the time I was in high school, I got a nice-sized one. It might have been a half-carat. It was a nice one, which I duly lost at Bower's Mansion when I was in college. [laughter] Anyway, he liked to buy presents. He bought me my first bike.

One thing my dad did for me (this is one of my favorite things) when he was struggling so badly, which he did most of his life . . . I wanted a bike. I was probably five or six. Well, there wasn't any money for a bike. He went out to the dumps, which were on the other side of the tailings, and found an old frame. Then we found probably wheels from something else. If my grandfather was around, he would have helped, and Daddy put together an old, rusted, red bike for me. It was a boy's bike. It didn't have any tires, and even if it had had tires or if he could have gotten tires, they wouldn't've lasted two minutes where Pete and I rode them. So he wired garden hose on the wheels. It was hard riding. I had very strong legs, and I never had a flat tire. [laughter] I hope he didn't think he wasn't doing well by me, because I thought it was wonderful. Eventually, my granddad bought me a girl's bike from the catalog. It was really snazzy. It was blue.

My granddad was a real funny guy, just a character. He was also a carpenter. He rebuilt that hotel that he burned down. He

could do about anything he wanted to do. He was about five-feet-six high and almost that wide, and he wore his pants hanging way down just like the boys today wear their pants, [laughter] because his tummy hung over the top. Oh, he was so cute. Only shaved every few months, and he used to tell me I brushed my teeth too much. And he says, "Look at me, I have all of my teeth, and I've never brushed them. It wears them out." And he died with all of his teeth, I will say that. They weren't very pretty. [laughter]

What do you think your parents' importance was to the town of Silver Peak?

When they were first married during this Mary Mine part, they were probably what would amount to the swinging socialites. The world was just so much fun, and Mother was very, very into having a new party dress every time there was a dance. My mother was the most unspoiled person in the entire world—the most down-to-earth, sensible, unspoiled person, but this person we read about in this diary was peeved because her party dress didn't arrive in time for the dance. That is a person I never even knew! [laughter] Oh, they were so social. They would go to breakfast next door, run over to Goldfield and see so-and-so, on to Tonopah to see somebody else, and on their way home stop up at the Mary Mine and visit and see who was there and then come home and have dinner with somebody, or somebody was dropping in, or they were going to Fish Lake for a party.

There goes the myth of being totally isolated, doesn't it?

Oh, yes.

They spent time with people all of the time.

Absolutely. Not on the telephone, in person—the progressive dinners and the

baseball games. There were always dances . . . sprinkling ivory flakes on the floor or cornmeal to make the floor slick for dancing. They were definitely in the center of the social world, until Janice happened, and then it slowed them down a little bit. But the war, of course, is what really closed it down. From there on, there were just the thirty to thirty-three of us that comprised Silver Peak. It was just the clan. They called themselves the clan. Then, when we went fishing on Fourth of July or to the rodeo or whatever, we went as a clan. Fishing trips were overnights, and rodeos generally were, too. We'd sleep at the creeks. It was an interactive, extended family. That is what the town was. And it was absolutely the most perfect way to grow up. Well, first of all, you belonged. You were part of a large, extended family. Everybody took care of everybody. I cherish the Silver Peak part of my life.

Moving to Gabbs was just so different. I just didn't belong. Even now, none of me belongs there. My sisters feel a connection to Gabbs, because they were small when they went there, but I was grown. To me Silver Peak is just special, and it's a magical place, because Pete and I had the entire salt flats. We had our hills, we had the hill-mountains behind us. (They're not really mountains, because they're not that big.) We just knew them so well. Where we couldn't ride our bikes, we hiked. We had the sand dunes over on Goat Island. We had the tailings to play in. We even tried to ski on the tailings, but it just didn't work! [laughter] We tried so hard! To me as a child it was adventure as well. I couldn't wait to get up and do whatever it was we were going to do, because it was exciting! The water slide . . . Sometimes we would play cops and robbers, and we had like half a county to play in! [laughter] We just had a wonderful time.

Did you go up to the mines at all, ever with your dad?

Oh, oh, absolutely. I feel so sorry for people that think a mine is something that is chopping the top of a hill off or just open-pit mines. Mines are stopes and shafts and tunnels, cold and exciting and mysterious and adventurous. Sometimes we would go back on the ore cars, and we would have our little carbide lights on our metal hats. You have to spit in it before you light it, and it bubbles. The carbide smells delicious. There's a special smell to it. Anyway, sometimes we'd go back on ore cars, and sometimes we would just walk if we weren't going to a very far stope. There's one stope in the Mary Mine . . . I think its Christmas stope, a huge cavernous room. You just come into it all of a sudden, and it had a couple of balcony-type things. You can smell the carbide, and it's cold in there. Dad wore long underwear twelve months a year. And, of course, there'd be blasting and pounding and picking, and it was just very exciting.

My dad got blasted, certainly more than once. Once it killed his partner. They were side by side, and the partner was dead. That was in Gabbs, though. Oh, there were constantly cave-ins. There was a lot of reality to it, a lot of grim reality. One time at the Mary Mine they had . . . It must have been an explosive gone wrong, because it caused a cave-in. It hurt a lot of people. But anyway, this one guy that was killed, and they brought him out. The hoist man is in charge of the bells, and there's a language of the bells. I used to know it. It'd tell you exactly what level to send the hoist to in Morse code or something. They sent out this guy who was so burned that his glasses were burned into his face, and he was alive and conscious. It would have been a long time before the doctor came from Tonopah, so that would have been probably an hour and a half. And he shot him with an air bubble to kill him, to put him out of his misery, and everyone was so grateful. I remember hearing that.

The top mines were always caving. The timbers just didn't always do it. And Argentite, of course, was the straight down shaft, maybe like ten levels, because they had that big cave-in, and I think it's closed on the sixth, because it's entombed—they couldn't recover the bodies, so it's a grave. The guys were always being hurt, so it was a grim business, too. I was very well aware of that.

Were you afraid for your father ever?

Well, he broke his back once while he was in Silver Peak and was in the hospital. He had a full body cast, and from there on he had a bad back. He spent some time in the Tonopah hospital. It seems like every other one of them, an uncle here and a cousin there, would at one time or another have the back My Uncle Pat broke his back but nothing permanent other than aches and pains. Let's see, one lost a finger—you know, just ordinary things like that. I'm sure my mother must have worried mightily. I'm sure all the women worried mightily. The scary parts generally had to do with me, because my dad would take me on roads that scared the you-know-what out of me. [laughter] And he kind of liked to tease a little bit, too. Now the roads that we went on sometimes were not fit for walking, let alone driving. They were straight up and straight down, and there wasn't any road, and there was a cliff. We had two little tracks maybe and no trees on the side to grab you if you were going to go over. My uncle Jack did go over once and broke his leg and had to crawl all the way up to get help. No, I don't remember worrying about the guys. I mostly just worried about my own safety in my dad's truck.

There was another teacher, Miss Agnes Gooch. She was ancient, and she was ugly and ornery and old. She wore the same dress the entire year, and it got real shiny on all the parts that stick out. [laughter] I always

wanted to take my fingernail and scrape it, write my initials in it! [laughter] Anyhow, Miss Gooch was really disliked by us, because she was very strict. She just wasn't pleasant—simple as that. I think she probably was a fairly good teacher. I know she taught us to say Chile [pronounces "chil-lay"], instead of Chile [pronounces "chili"], in South America. [laughter] But she called me Janice (pronounced *Jan eece*). Oh! And, of course, all my cousins called me the same, because I hated it so much. I had a seizure of some sort one afternoon, and Pete went across the street to get my mother. Miss Gooch was helping carry me home, and she fell on our front step and broke her hip and died. And Pete always said I was his best friend because I killed Miss Gooch. She obviously was not hireable, because she was so old. I think she truly was old. I think she was well equipped but old. Anne Tomany came back from Tonopah to teach one year, which was wonderful for us.

There were no politics. We didn't have city councils. I do know that my family was the only Republican family. Everybody else was Democrats. I don't know why my mom and dad happened to be oddballs at that time. But my cousin Susie, that was always our main bone of contention. I was Republican, and she was a Democrat, and it remains the same today. [laughter] And we know we're both right, too.

Tell me a little bit more about your mother's diary.

I learned she wasn't dying to be a mother. It was a great shock to me. [laughter] I thought her life depended on us. [laughter] The guys . . . their form of recreation, during whatever it was they were recreating at (fishing, hunting, et cetera), drinking was a large part of it. They really drank constantly. My mother never drank or smoked. She was always the driver,

from the time she was little for her father and always for the gang.

Did your dad drink?

Every Friday, Saturday . . . whenever they were vacationing, the last entry she wrote was, "And the boys are feeling really good." [laughter] It was fun. It was OK. That [drinking socially] got different later, much later. But it wasn't a problem then. Yes, it was a fun thing.

It was only a five-year diary, so it's very short. It was before my second sister was born. It just happened to cover the year before they were married and probably two years after I was born, so it's a very short span, but it really got across to me what a social world they kept and how closely knit they were with their friends and how they kept track of each other. They went out of their way to be really social. She would describe trying to be a fancy cook, because she's having so-and-so and so-and-so over for dinner, and then she would describe what so-and-so's dinner party was like and what they wore. The fashion! We have all sorts of pictures of my mother in these really great getups, and we never knew our mother as a clotheshorse at all. Of course, my mother, when we were growing up, had maybe three house dresses and they were always tattered—sweet baby. And I know that made my dad feel bad. My dad really cared.

Yes, but it's really symbolic of how hard these years were.

Yes. It was. One time when my dad was off at a mine, I think it was over by Aurora. It was far enough away that he didn't get back very often. That meant probably on the weekends, and then he came back with flowers on my graduation. Oh, he was so wonderful! Anyway, he was gone, and we ate macaroni the entire time he was gone

because that's what we had. I'm sorry they had to have such hard times. But they were real good . . . They loved each other so much. They really enjoyed each other.

So it was a home where there was fun and laughter in spite of eating macaroni?

Absolutely. Absolutely, yes. Mother was very intuitive about mothering. And how she came up with some of it really surprises me, and how well-educated she was, because she wasn't allowed to finish high school. She had to go with her dad to the mines . . . He took her out of school, and she had just started her junior year. It killed her, because she loved school. She was studying Latin and wanted to be a doctor.

So that home library was pretty important.

Apparently so. I hadn't really thought . . . I know I've always looked at it from a selfish point of view. I liked it. Obviously, it was there for a reason. It wasn't there only for me.

How do you think growing up in Silver Peak and being part of an extended family had an impact on your life?

I know I'm independent for that reason. I take care of things my own way. For instance, bringing up my children, going to the hospital is not the first thing I think of, or calling the doctor is not the first thing I think of. I take care of it myself. I look back on some of the things that my mother did, and she must have been petrified. She didn't have a mother to call or an aunt. Sometimes, I guess, she had Aunt Gerry. My sister Barbara nearly died of whooping cough when she was just a few months old. In fact, that's another time the doctor flew out from Tonopah . . . She nearly lost Barbara, and she must have been petrified. Can you imagine? Out in the middle of nowhere and

not knowing what to do. But that wasn't scary to me, which, I suppose, if a person that had never lived through that were thrown into it cold, it'd be pretty scary.

But there was a sense that, because there was no doctor nearby, the wives and mothers had to take care of a lot of quote "little things" on their own?

Yes. Oh absolutely, absolutely. Very self-sufficient. And very often my mother was the one that someone would come to. Another thing, my mother always kept current on her reading, especially what was going on in the medical world. She was particularly interested in medicine. I don't know if she seriously thought about becoming a doctor, but she knew she'd be good at medicine had the world been open to her. She always said she wanted to be an archaeologist.

Well, I know I was allowed to be very athletic. And I had a lot of time to read, as did my cousin Susie. I think we were well educated because we read a lot. And I'd go around with my dad oftentimes. He thought I was funny and cute, and that was a nice feeling. It's a nice feeling growing up someplace where everybody loves you.

My uncle Pat thought of the funniest thing. He told wonderful stories. Sometimes you weren't sure where the truth started and left off, but this, I think, really happened. [laughter] He and some of his pals (I think one of his best pals was my mom's cousin . . . Elwood or little Fayette Jr.), a bunch of them got together, and they were probably drunk. They went out to the volcano and stacked old tires and set them on fire and went in and told them that the

volcano was exploding. It didn't work as well as it should have. [laughter] But wasn't that a wonderful idea? And climbing the volcano was another big deal. You had to try it at least once a year, and it was very difficult. Actually, getting to the top was not always possible because you'd fall back—just like climbing a sand dune, only it's harder stuff. And, of course, we'd always go up the hard side, because you could walk up the backside. Going up to the sand dunes as a group was a big thing. They took us children out at least once a year, because we begged, and we'd roast marshmallows and stuff out there and get stuck and shoot off fireworks out at the sand dunes. It was a big deal, and I know they didn't like to do it, because they knew somebody was going to get stuck. They were fun. They were generous with their time with us, when they had any time at all, and that wasn't a lot. But they gave us our due for sure.

I had my chores. And, of course, we also helped with branding. I was a terrible horsewoman, but I got my licks in a little bit. [laughter] I was the most abused, because I was the oldest, and I had to empty the younger girls' potty, because we had an outhouse. I had to use the outdoor one even when it was dark, and the little kids didn't have to. I was the dishwasher, and I babysat my sisters. And I was supposed to keep my room clean, and I never, ever did that.

Mother planted trees, and they had to be so carefully tended, because it was so dry and salty, et cetera. She loved anything that bloomed, but it was so hard to get anything to bloom. Hollyhocks, ugly old hollyhocks would grow. [laughter] They're fuzzy, and they give you a rash. [laughter]

BARBARA DODGION

BARBARA CHIATOVICH DODGION spent the first ten years of her life in Silver Peak, Nevada. The daughter of Stanley Chiatovich and Frances Hill Chiatovich, Barbara was a child surrounded by relatives. The safety of growing up among extended family and the happy times spent together were Barbara's best memories, which she related in her 1996 oral history interview. Barbara also kept track of the family's genealogy, and the relationships between double cousins never stumped Barbara.



BARBARA DODGION: I was born in Tonopah, Nevada, February 25, 1940. Dr. Craig was my doctor. My parents lived in Silver Peak, and they drove to Tonopah so I could be born. My father was Stanley Martin Chiatovich, and my mother was Frances Lillian Hill Chiatovich.

VICTORIA FORD: Both families were very prominent families in the Silver Peak area, very active in business and in community affairs there?



Yes, my father, Stanley Martin Chiatovich, was very busy with mines there in Silver Peak. My mother, Frances Lillian Hill, was in Goldfield, but her father [Frank Hill] ran the mill with my father in Silver Peak. When my mother married my father in 1934, she moved to Silver Peak, and that's where they lived until 1950.

There were several mines, and I don't know if my father was at the Mary Mine or another mine. But they had a group of men . . . I think they called it the Argentite group. The Mohawk Silver Mine was

involved with that. My Grandfather Hill brought the men up in the buckets from down in the mine.

You moved away from Silver Peak when you were how old?

I was ten. I was born in 1940, and we moved in 1950. I was in the fifth grade.

Your mom also worked in Silver Peak. Is that right?

Yes, they had this store-bar-and-post-office combination, and the three women would run the store. They were co-owners. Most of the people who lived there in Silver Peak were all related, so more or less everybody owned or had a part of the work to do. [laughter] The women who ran the store were my mother, Frances Chiatovich, Ruby Shirley [Griffin], and Virginia Humphrey.

In your family tree you have double cousins, brothers who married sisters. Can you explain that?

All right. My grandfather on my father's side was Martin Chiatovich.

Who was the son of John, one of the early settlers that started the first cyanide mill?

Right, yes. They came into Fish Lake and settled there, and they had a ranch. Martin was married to Nellie Cleary, and they were the parents of my father, Stanley Martin Chiatovich.

And now on my mother's side of the family, that's where the double cousins are. My mother's father [Frank Hill] married Lillian, and she was sister to Geraldine, or Gerry, whose husband was Fayette Hill. And Fayette and my grandfather Frank Hill were brothers. [Brothers married sisters, i.e.

Fayette Hill married Geraldine Houser, and Frank Hill married Lillian Houser.]

Momma was born in Los Angeles. Then they came to Goldfield, but Fayette and Grandad, I think, were both born in Truckee, California. From there they came into Goldfield, because they both worked the mine and ran the mills.

My grandmother, Lillian, divorced Frank. She went down to San Francisco, where she remarried a man named Jorgenson and had another family. But my grandfather stayed up here and worked in the mines and in the mills. After the divorce, my mother stayed with her father.

Do you know any information about that divorce and how that split the family back in that generation? Would that have been the turn of the century?

I don't know. That's something that's in Momma's diary, but I can't remember. I would go down to San Francisco and visit with her mother.

Did your mother ever talk about how that affected her?

No, not really. She just was very close to her father. She kept house for him when she was growing up, and she just stayed with him. That was just her way of life.

Grandad then married a lady by the name of Betty, but they were only married for two years. My mother was nineteen at the time . . . that was before she was married.

You learned a lot of this from your mother's diary?

Yes, I did. I didn't know a lot of things until I read her diary. [laughter] Mother was a very private person. She pretty much kept things to herself. Just in the last few years she started talking about a few things. Well,

in her diary it says that Momma and Daddy were engaged on Christmas Day. He gave her a ring. That was in 1933, and they got married February 2 in 1934. Ruby and Ernie Shirley stood up with them, and, I think, they were married in Goldfield. I do have their marriage license. Then they went (and this amazes me and my daughters) on a honeymoon, and Ruby and Ernie Shirley went with them. [laughter]

They made a trip together, all four of them?

I think they went to Vegas, but I can't really say where they went. They had a good time. Ruby and my mother went shopping a lot, and I don't know what the men did. [laughter]

I knew that we were all very close when I grew up, because we always had potluck dinners out on the marsh. And, whenever we did anything, it was all together. I don't

remember doing many things alone. We went swimming together. We walked, everything We just did it together. That's how we grew up, with other people. Every evening Momma and Ruby and my sister, Jaci, and I would all meet, and we'd go for a walk down by the water hole or down by the marsh. We just walked around Silver Peak. It was always fun, just walking along and seeing everything. We would skip and hop. Jaci and I would be way ahead, and my mother and Ruby would be talking. They were close friends. In a community like that, when you're close and don't have a lot of people, everybody more or less does things together.

Describe some of the potlucks.

We'd all get together and go out on the flat and have a supper. That's what they called it, the flat. I don't even remember



"And whenever we did anything, it was all together. . . Every evening Momma and Ruby and my sister, Jaci, and I would all meet, and we'd go for a walk. . ." L to r: Jaci, Frances, Janice, and Barbara Chiatovich, with an unidentified friend in 1947 at Cow Canyon. (Photograph courtesy of Barbara Dodgion.)

playing games. We'd climb the little hills and just have a lot of fun. We were free, even in the town, because it's not like it is now. Everybody knew everybody. We had certain areas that we couldn't go. We had a hill behind our house, and if my sister and I wanted to go up on that hill, we had to make sure that our mother knew that's where we were going. Everybody kept an eye on everybody else. You couldn't do anything bad or everybody would know. [laughter]

*And they would tell your parents, right?
[laughter]*

Right. [laughter] Well, we weren't allowed to wander. I mean, my mother did know where we were. We had scooters, and I was always falling on the scooter and skinning my knees. And we had roller skates, and we roller-skated. There was a bar that was up on the main road there, and there was a cement slab left [from the old building], and that's where my sister, Jaci, and I used to roller-skate. It was next to the store—not the one that burned down. This was the replacement they put up on the main street, so it was next to where Momma was working.

Were there any paved roads in Silver Peak when you were a child?

Well, the main road was more or less paved, but it's not like your paved roads today. No sidewalks.

When you talked about the store that burned down, was that the store that your mother and Ruby and Virginia owned?

Yes. My mother kept holding my sister, Jaci, because she kept trying to climb over the fence and leave, because she was scared. I remember waking up that night, and Momma saying, "Stan . . ." or something. I don't know if she knew that the place was on

fire. It was destroyed, and the cans that had been burned and popped smelled.

It wasn't too long before they started the other store up on the main street, because that's where people got the mail and their supplies. My Uncle Marco [Martin's brother] would bring in the supplies from Tonopah. The railroad came in from Hawthorne and went over to Tonopah, and they had a stop where you turn off to go to Silver Peak [Blair Junction]. They would leave the mail, and my Uncle Marco picked it up. Sometimes my mother would go and we went with her, like when we were ill. We'd take our paper dolls and things, my sister and I, and we'd play in the back of the car Mother usually wasn't there a long time. We'd go down with her when she tended the store, too. They took turns operating the store.

There was a water hole, there against the mountain, across from the marsh, and we used to go swimming there. We learned to swim, and we started out with lifesaving vests, and then Daddy would take them off, and we would just swim by ourselves. That was a lot of fun. We definitely were not allowed to go there alone. That was a no-no, so to speak. [laughter] In fact, they kept pretty close watch . . . my mother kept an eye on us, and we got into trouble if we went places that weren't supposed to. [laughter]

What was it like in your family to get into trouble?

Well, my mother was the one that was around most of the time, so she usually did the discipline. We couldn't go certain places. We were confined to the house or to the yard, and we couldn't go off and do things. We couldn't be as free as we wanted. [laughter] We lost privileges by doing that.

Even in Gabbs, when we moved there, my mother was a homebody. She was involved in community things, but her family came first. She made sure that we all

were taken care of. Always did. She was a good cook, loved to cook . . .

Which you've inherited. There are some other things that are alike about you and your mom. You mentioned being early risers.

Yes. I like to get up early, and Momma always did, too, except when she retired. Then she would say, "I've got to stay in bed until seven o'clock, because I don't know what to do the rest of the day." She had worked before, but after she retired, she belonged to, I think, three bridge clubs there in Yerington. Of course, she was with her double cousin, Gerry [Gerry Hill Cooper], too, and Gerry had a family. They were doing things all the time, having dinners and things, so she kept busy. Gerry was about five or six years younger than Momma, and they were friends as well as cousins.

In Silver Peak, I do think Daddy might have belonged to the Masonic Lodge in Tonopah. No, I think it was Elks. But I don't think there were formal groups for women. They took care of the school, you know, getting the schoolmarm. [laughter] Anyway, when you live in a community like that, you do everything together.

We had a one-room school that was grades one through eight. Each class has to take their turn with the teacher, and the other class was supposed to study. Of course, a lot of times we wouldn't study: we would listen to all that's going on. But there weren't that many students. I had three in my class. One was Buddy, who wasn't related to me, but Johnny Boyd was a cousin. Most of the people that were in our classes were related to us. Mrs. Norris was our teacher. She had two daughters: Luella was one of them, and I think the other one was Barbara. We would get together one evening on a weekday at the teacher's house, and we'd have a sewing group. My mother and I, we'd go over, and we'd sew

something or embroidery. That was just a little something extra.

For recess we did all kinds of games, had baseball and kickball. The playground was dirt. There goes my skinned knees again! I think my knees were always skinned. There was no grass or anything. I don't even remember anybody having grass there in Silver Peak. I think it was all dirt. You grew up with dirt. We had trees and flowers, hollyhocks. Seems that we had lots of hollyhocks. And Ruby had trees, and she had a beautiful garden. We had hollyhocks, too. We had a circle in the back of our yard that had hollyhocks. We also had lots of cats as pets.

We had a man by the name of Reverend Shriver from Carson City who would come out . . . I think it was a once a month. He would have church service and tell stories. He would visit all these different mining towns. He told stories of the Bible with a felt board and felt figures. These little figures made of felt would cling to the board, and, as he told the story, he'd put these figures up, like a figure of Jesus.

So you had those instead of storybooks, or did you have it in addition to books about Jesus?

No. Well, I don't remember the books. I just remember the felt board. When I moved up to Gabbs, I was very astonished to find out that he came there, too.

While I was growing up, my father loved to read, and he would read a story to us every night. He wouldn't finish the book all at once. We'd have certain chapters every night. We'd climb up on his lap and listen to stories. Mommy did her sewing at night. She would either embroidery or mend, or she sewed dresses and things like that. That was her time to do things like that, when everybody was in bed or sleeping.

As a family, we would also listen to the radio. We didn't have TV then. It was radio.



"While I was growing up, my father loved to read, and he would read a story to us every night." Stanley Chiatovich with daughters Barbara and Janice at Silver Peak. (Photograph courtesy of Barbara Dodgion.)

We'd listen to the "Fibber McGee and Molly" show, where he opened up the closet and everything fell out. [laughter] And Charlie McCarthy and Edgar Bergen. The one that Jaci and I liked the most, and we'd get scared, was the squeaky door. [laughter] They'd tell spooky stories, but we didn't get to listen to that a lot. My mother wouldn't let us listen to it all the time.

Do you remember any of the names of the books that your dad read to you?

Black Beauty was my favorite, and *My Friend Flicka*. Also, on Fridays, we would have a book like *Treasure Island*, and my teacher would read certain chapters for an hour or so.

Did your mother sew all of your clothes?

She sewed most of our clothes, yes. It's not like going down here [Carson City], where we have lots of stores.

Do you remember shopping trips away from Silver Peak?

Oh, yes. We would go to Tonopah and do our shopping sometimes, which was fun. We would take off and go to Reno to the rodeo, and Momma would do some shopping then. But in a town like that, if somebody was going to town and you couldn't go, you would give them a list and say, "I need this and that," and they would shop for everybody. That's how you helped out, and the same when you would go in for your doctor's appointments, too. And then we'd go to Hawthorne and visit my cousin Ethel and Hank Gilbert, too. They had a clothing store there, and my sister Jaci and I used to have lots of fun going in there, because he had a back room with all the old clothes, and Jaci and I would love to go and pick out a pair of high heels, hats, and gloves, and a dress—you know, dress up, that was fun.

Often, when we wanted something, we ordered it from the catalog. Catalogs were very prevalent. We used them all the time . . . Sears, Montgomery Wards. I don't remember Penney's. In Momma's diary, I laughed, because she kept waiting for a dress that she wanted to have for her dance, and it wouldn't come. The coat came, but the dress didn't come. Then, if it didn't fit just right, there were always people that would help you adjust it. But that's how things were done.

As a child, do you remember dreaming over the catalog?

Oh, yes. Our favorite thing for my sister, Jaci, and I was the Christmas catalog. I think we marked every doll . . . everything. [laughter] Yes, we would mark mostly toys. But every now and then there was a dress or something that we liked or shoes. That's how we got our Christmas presents, too, would be by the mail, so you always made sure that you ordered things way ahead of time.

For food, we would go to Tonopah. But as for food like meat, they had the cattle. They

owned cows. Harvey was the one that took care of them, but I imagine they all did. You just had the wide, open ranges, and that's where the cows were, and the horses, too. And then, they'd have a roundup every fall, and they would brand the calves and take care of them. Everybody did that so that everything was done together, unless somebody was ill or something. Everybody did everything together, or else things didn't get done. [laughter]

Do you remember the roundups?

We weren't really allowed to go, because that's a time when they were working and couldn't watch us. But I do remember the cow camps, where the women would do the cooking and take the food to the men.

When your mother went to work at the store, you and Jaci went with her? You didn't have a babysitter?

No, no. [laughter] Well, if Momma and Daddy had to go off someplace, I remember staying with my cousin, Virginia, and I'm sure I stayed with Ruby and Ernie. Then we went to our other relatives. They always kept an eye on us. But mostly we went with our parents. You did things together, and that's just how it was. And if they couldn't take their kids, I guess, they just didn't go. I went everywhere with my mother. When she was busy doing something, we were taught to be quiet and not interrupt.

So you knew appropriate behavior for some of these adult situations at an early age?

Sure. I brought both of my girls up the same way. I'd take them everywhere, and they knew that they were to be quiet, because I was busy.

The mines were closed down for World War II. During the ten years that you were at Silver Peak, it had to have been a slow time in terms of the economy there. Do you remember anything about the war or the economy or changes in the mining operation or population?

During that time, my father left Silver Peak and went to Reno. That's where my sister was born in 1942 during the war. In fact, at one time my mother said that when she was carrying me, they were in Oregon doing some kind of mining there, so they went around to different places. When you're a miner, you go where the work is, and that's why we moved to Gabbs, because the mines stopped producing in Silver Peak.

And that's where you finished growing up was in Gabbs? You never went back to Silver Peak after that?

No. Oh, we visited, but we never lived there again, no. We visited cousin Ruby, and we used to visit Vollmars . . . I'm sure it was his sister, Johanna.

When we moved to Gabbs, we were going to rent a house down in Brucite Camp in South Gabbs. If you worked for the Basic Mine, that's where you lived. But Daddy worked in the Smith Mines, so we moved out to Quartz Mountain until our house was completed at Smithville. And then we lived in that house until I was either a freshman or a sophomore in high school. Then Daddy and Momma moved the house that my Uncle John had built in Silver Peak up to Gabbs, and we had a room built onto it. And then, Momma lived there until she retired from being postmaster.

So moving this entire house from one town to another, was that unusual?

Yes. [laughter] That was a big deal, too, and we were all excited about it. I guess

Momma just loved that house, because my Great Uncle John Chiatovich had built it for them when they got married. In those times, you always had porches, so from the front porch you came into a living room. It was a big living room, and there were bookcases that divided the room. And then there was a dining room, which had the table, and we had the big oil stove there. Off to the right there was a little room that was my sister Janice's bedroom. To the left would be the kitchen, which had a porch and stairs going down from the porch into the yard. Straight back from the living room was Daddy's and Momma's bedroom. And that's where my sister and I had a room, too. Well, it really wasn't a bedroom. There was a little room that was supposed to be a bathroom. But we never did get a bathroom: we had an outhouse. [laughter]

We did have running water in the house, because we had a well. We had a bathhouse, and there was a shower in that house. That's where Momma did the laundry, too. That was a separate building down from the house. We had the water heater, and the well had a small building around it. We also had rabbit hutches.

I don't remember doing much with my sister, Janice, but I was born in 1940, and Jaci was born in 1942. We shared rooms together. We just did everything together, so she's the one that I remember the most. Janice was in high school when we moved, because she skipped ahead a grade. In that time, there was no high school in Silver Peak, so she boarded out—lived with some people in Tonopah and went to high school there.

Pete and Sue were cousins. Pete belonged to Louis Shirley, which was a brother to Virginia and Ernie. And Sue belonged to Virginia and Harvey Humphrey. She was their daughter. They were the same age [as Janice]. And Colleen was also, but she lived in Hawthorne. Colleen was Ethel and Hank's daughter. See, the women were

all Shirleys, so the children were all cousins. They all did things together, and they went to school in Tonopah, except for Colleen.

We had a terrible blizzard one year during that time I was in Silver Peak. We thought we had lost my Uncle Marco, because he didn't come back from the mail run. It was in 1945 or 1946, because the whole state of Nevada got hit with that. It was really bad. I remember my mother and father pacing the floor, and then they all went out looking for him. They found him and brought him in. He was stopped somewhere by the volcano, I think, is where they found him. Uncle Marco used to have dinner with us almost every night, because he wasn't married.

Did your dad ever take you up to the mines at all?

Oh, yes. We went up to Nivloc and all those different mines. I don't ever remember going into the mines with him, because that was one place we just really didn't go. That's where they worked, and that was a dangerous place. We didn't play around in the mines and the shafts and things. That was a place that we . . . respected.

Daddy was just in mining then, and he moved from one place to wherever there was a mine working. And many a time, he would be gone during the week and come home on the weekends. Sometimes in the summertime we would go where he was mining—the whole family would just pack up and go wherever he was and be there.

I knew he was a miner, and he also worked with the cows. One time they brought a bull in, and he tried to load him into the pickup. They had rails and things so he could carry different animals, but the darn bull didn't want to stay. I remember the bull getting up in the truck and then going over. I was in the cab. I was scared to death—I just knew he was coming to get me.

[laughter] They had a time with that bull, getting him into the pickup.

I only remember happiness when we were in Silver Peak. I had a wonderful family, and I just remember good times. I imagine there were hard times, but when you're a kid you don't know that. [laughter] I guess if there were hard times, they didn't harp on it, because I don't remember. It was during wartime. Things were hard to get, but I'm sure it probably wasn't as hard for them as it was for some, because they were pretty self-sufficient. They had the cows, they had food and all. But everybody had to ration, so I'm sure it was hard for my mother and father, but we never knew that. I can just remember good times.

Momma was always a homemaker. After we moved together, that's what she did. Oh, she belonged to bridge clubs and women's clubs and things like that, but she didn't become interested in the post office until after Daddy died in 1960.

Do you know what he died of?

They call it the "Valley Fever." It attacks your spinal system and your brain. You lose control of your balance and things like that. He had been sick for some time, just didn't feel good, and he was not too stable with his walking. Valley Fever is life threatening, and Daddy was more or less used as a guinea pig for some of the drugs and treatment that they were using. They had recorded Valley Fever down in the Owens Valley, down by Bishop and in that area: that's where you can get that. It's a fever, and one of his aunts had died from it.

He spent a good amount of time in Santa Barbara. Actually, he had an operation to take the fluid from his brain. He came through the operation just fine, but that night he got a blood clot in his leg, and it traveled to his heart, and he died. His

operation was in San Francisco—Stanford, I think. That's where he passed away.

I was married in 1958, and he was not able to walk me down the aisle. My mother had to help him stand up when they said, "Who gives this woman to the marriage?"

But you would have been a fairly young woman when your father died?

I was nearly twenty.

And when you married, did you live near to your parents?

No, my husband was in the army, and we went to Texas. My mother called and said Daddy was real bad, so my husband, Lewis, brought me home.

I know this is hard to talk about, especially since your mother has just passed away.

My mother was with him. I stayed with Lewis' parents in Gabbs. I got to see him, though. He was in Porterville, California, so when Lewis brought me home, we went down. Daddy got to see his granddaughter, Debbie, our daughter. My husband had to go back to Texas to finish out his term in the army.

After your father passed away, then your mother went to work?

Yes. My mother-in-law and a friend had her take the test, and they got her involved in the post office. My mother-in-law had moved to Fallon, so it left a vacant spot for Momma to work with Babe Dennias: that's where she got started. And then, when Babe retired, Momma became postmaster. That's how she earned her living. My sister, Jaci, was still in high school when dad died, and she then graduated and went on to college. But my sister Janice and I were both married, and we each had a child.

When your mom retired as postmaster at Gabbs, did she stay in Gabbs?

No, we moved her to Yerington after that, and she's lived in Yerington ever since then, until she died there this year. Her wish was that . . . she never wanted to be buried

out in Silver Peak. [laughter] I guess it's because of the isolation, but she told everybody that: "Don't bury me out there." That was her wish, so we didn't. [laughter] Well, her relatives are mostly buried in Goldfield. But all of Daddy's, most all the Chiatoviches are there in Silver Peak.

NANCY ADAMS

NANCY ADAMS spent her childhood summers in Silver Peak with her grandparents, Lloyd and Martha Mount. Unlike living in the big city of Los Angeles during the winters, in Silver Peak Nancy experienced a freedom which she credits with shaping her independent spirit. Her memories of riding wild mustangs and exploring old mill buildings illustrate some of the high adventures available to children.



VICTORIA FORD: Today is July 19, 1996. I am here with Nancy Adams in her home in Carson City. Nancy, let's start with your family tree. Could you go back and give me the full names of your grandparents and your parents, and then we'll talk about your early memories of Silver Peak?

NANCY ADAMS: My grandfather was Lloyd Mount. My grandmother was Martha Lawson Mount. Martha was from Utah. My grandfather was from Kentucky originally. When they married, they married in Richville, Utah, and moved to Manhattan, Nevada. That's where they spent their early



married life, and then on to Tonopah and Goldfield and then to Silver Peak.

OK. Was your grandfather following the mining industry then?

Yes. He was a frustrated prospector. That's what he wanted to do was find gold. As a matter of fact, he had a silver mine outside of Las Vegas at one time, and he mined that. In later years, when he was in

his seventies, he had a uranium mine that he mined.

Where was that? In Nevada?

Somewhere out of Hawthorne.

Was mining his avocation, but it took up a lot of his time?

Yes.

So Lloyd and Martha had two sons, is that correct?

Yes, Ward and Keith. And Keith was my father.

And your father was married to . . . ?

And my father married Mabel Cooley in Los Angeles.

All right. And they lived back and forth between Los Angeles and Silver Peak?

They lived on the Covatas Mine outside of Las Vegas. I can remember that. My father worked on the Hoover Dam when it was being built. They lived in Los Angeles, and it's kind of confusing at this point. I'd have to think about it for a while—what the time elements were.

I was born in Los Angeles in 1932. And spent a lot of my time in Silver Peak. Just . . . parts that I can remember were when I was probably in first and second, third grade, around that time.

Tell me how you got to Silver Peak. You went to stay with your grandparents?

My grandparents moved to Silver Peak, because the Mary Mine was opening and there were jobs there. And my grandfather worked for the Mary Mine, and as far as I can remember he was working on the tailings,

whatever they did doing that, and taking care of this little pond of water that was next to the house that they lived in.

And you're not quite clear what that meant, "taking care of the pond?" But it seemed to be one of his responsibilities—whether that was part of the mining process or the fresh-water source . . .

Yes. I don't think it was a fresh-water source, but there was No, I don't remember exactly what it was he was doing for that, but I do believe it was for the mine.

OK. All right. And then he also ran a dairy?

And then he had a dairy. He had a herd of cows. [laughter] The dairy was against a small rise. And so two of the walls of the dairy were dug out from that, from the rock in that rise. And then there were wooden railings for the other two walls of the dairy. There were a group of cows in there and a very small shack, as I recall. The cows were

Is that where the milking took place, in the shack?

There may just have been an open space with an overhead roof of some kind for the milking. I don't know whether the shack was for the processing or what. But the cows were let out at night onto the salt flats to roam, and then they would be gathered in every morning to be milked. My brothers' job in the summertime was to milk those cows. And I would sit, and they would try to teach me how to do it. Evidently I was too young to manipulate my hands the right way, because I couldn't do it. And then they would sell the milk. They would not process it. It was raw milk put into milk bottles and sold to other people who lived in Silver Peak.

Do you know, where did the process of putting it into the bottles take place? Was it in the shack?

And I'm sure it was in the shack of some sort.

And was there a cooling system for the milk? Do you know how it was kept cold, or was it sold right away?

I don't recall. I really don't know.

So the dairy is not what we would think of as a dairy today.

Hardly. [laughter]

It was a corral, a small shed, some cows.

Certainly. Milking cows and selling it to other people.

But was it a prosperous business for him?

Oh, I have no idea. I doubt if it was, because he certainly worked for the mine at the same time, so it was additional income.

And describe your grandparents' house then. You went to stay during the summers?

Yes, my parents would drive us right up after school, after Memorial Day, deposit us there, and leave us until Labor Day. And they would go off and have their summer vacation or do whatever they had to do, whatever they wanted to do. I stayed with my grandmother and grandfather.

The house was probably, oh, twenty by sixteen, something of that sort. I've lost perspective because I was so small at the time. It seemed huge to me. On one wall there was a Murphy bed that was taken out of the wall and let down every night. That's where I remember my grandmother taught

me how to say my prayers, and that's where I memorized the prayer.

Kneeling by the bed?

No, that was always in bed. Yes, I would be next to her. On one wall was a kitchen, so to speak. There was a sink and a stove, and must have been an icebox . . . can't remember that. Other than that it was a one-room building. And outside was a bathroom in a little shack.

And was the corral near to the house?

Yes. It was just across the road. The road from Coaldale Junction came in at this spot, and the house Let me see if I can describe this. The road went over a rise and dipped down into the town. And at the top of the rise on the south side, I believe, was the house. And across the road was the corral and the buildings, and beyond that was the flats, the salt flats.

And how far did your grandfather have to go to the mine to work? Do you recall?

I don't recall that at all. I can't even recall him going to work. [laughter]

But you came to stay in the one-room house, and there was one bed. So with you and two brothers, how did the sleeping arrangements work, with the grandparents and all three of you? You obviously slept with your grandma some of the time in the bed.

Some of the time I probably did. And that's one reason I suspect my grandfather might have worked at night for the mine, because I seem to remember him around during the days, so I just assumed that. I have no idea whether that's true or not. And I don't know where my brothers slept. Probably on the floor.

OK. Tell me what you kids did there during the summers.

Well, my brothers went out when they got there and captured wild mustangs for themselves, broke them, and that was the transportation. My grandfather told me I couldn't *have* my own horse until I learned to get up on it by myself. And we had a bridle only, and there were no saddles, no anything. So I had to grab this horse's mane, shinny up its leg, and get on the horse. That way I was allowed to ride it by myself.

And that was your horse now, or was that one of your brothers' horses?

That was probably one of my brothers' horses. I don't remember ever having one of my own.

Did you name the horses?

The horses were Joker and Ace. And they *never* lost their wildness, because one of the things they *loved* to do was, we would be riding along, and they would see a clothesline full of clothes, and they would jump and turn and run under it to try and get us off of their backs. And we would be very good at learning to duck every time we'd see a clothesline, because they would not stop. They were very hard to control.

You told about one time when you and your brother went to the store.

My grandmother sent us to the store which was a block away, the Northern, to get coffee or milk or something. And I wanted to go along, so my brother'd put me on the back of the horse, and we trotted up there and got off, and he said, "I want you to stay outside and watch Ace, and I'll go in and get the groceries. And do not touch this horse!"

Well, when he left, the wind came up, and everything's blowing through the air.

And the horse was very skitterish, so I reached up to pet its nose, and it scared him. He reared back, snapped the two-by-four in half that he was tied to, which held up the overhang on the store. It collapsed, and people were running in all different directions. My brother came out of the store in a cloud of dust and was so angry at me that he made me walk home behind him and the horse and didn't ever want me to ever get on his horse again. [laughter]

My brothers had .22s, and they would go out shooting birds, I believe it was. But one time I remember they went shooting, and they shot toward one of the outhouses. And poor Mrs. Bagby running out. [laughter] Very, very angry because they had shot right through the outhouse and almost hit her. And they got in terrible trouble for that. [laughter]

We used to go swimming at the old swimming hole, which was out on the salt flat. And my grandmother didn't want me to be out there alone with my brothers when I couldn't swim. So she decided to teach me how to swim, but *she* didn't know how to swim. So she found a dog harness, and she put that on me, and she tied a rope to it and walked around the edge of this swimming hole. And I learned how to dog paddle. At the end of the summer when my parents came, the big event was that I jumped off of the edge and into this bottomless pit. That's what they used to call it, too, was the bottomless pit, and I could swim across it, and it was so exciting. My parents were very excited to see that I had learned to swim.

There was a story about how deep this pit was.

Someone had pushed an old car into the pit, and no one had ever been able to dive deep enough to see or find that car. So it must have been a spring from very deep in the earth that was coming up there.



"We used to go swimming at the old swimming hole, which was out on the salt flat. . . At the end of the summer when my parents came, the big event was that I jumped off of the edge and into this bottomless pit." The old swimming hole at Silver Peak Marsh. (Photograph courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society, Acc. # ESM 830.)

And it was out at the salt flats.

Yes.

And did you always ride horses out there? Was it some distance from your grandparents'?

It was a great distance from there. I remember riding horses out there and also riding in the car. I'm sure when my grandparents went with us, why, we went in the car.

Another story about the skittish horses . . . tell about the one horse that you rode out there and how you dismounted when you got back.

Well, when I was allowed to ride by myself or with other kids . . . The horses, of course, were mustangs, and they had a

mind of their own, and they didn't like to leave the corral. So you'd have to prod them and push them and kick them in the sides to make them leave the corral and walk out onto the salt flats. But the minute you turned around to go home again, the horse took the lead. And I was such a little girl, I had no strength to hold the horse back. And that horse would just run for that corral and would not stop till it got to the edge of the door, right to the gate, and would stop on a dime. I would invariably fly over its head, hit the gate, and fall to the ground. And that was my way of getting off the horse for the longest time, until I got strong enough to kind of hold the horse back. [laughter]

It sounds like you had a lot of freedom as a child there.

Just total freedom. There was an old mill across the road. And as I recall, it was already closed: I don't think they used the

mill. Or maybe it was just shut down for the time being. But we used to go up there, and it seemed to me like the size of a roller coaster. It was so huge. And we'd climb every single inch of that mill. And it would be these old iron beams all over the place with these cars that came and went, and we would pretend that it all worked, and we were in there. It was great, great fun.

My grandfather used to tell us that if we put the hair from the tail of a horse in water that it would turn into a snake, and we spent the entire summer waiting for that to turn into a snake. [laughter] It never did. [laughter]

You also remembered the bottles.

Yes. We put old bottles out, because in those days there was a lot of lead in the glass, and we'd leave them in the sun. And when we'd come back each summer, why, they'd have turned blue and beautiful, and we just loved that. That was great fun.

So you'd leave them for the year when you were gone.

Yes, and we tried all summer . . . You'd see them start turning, and then when you'd come back in the next year, why, they'd be a beautiful, beautiful blue, sort of a cobalt blue you'd call it. I don't know.

When you were climbing around inside the mill . . . it must have been a mill, it sounds like?

Yes, I think it's still there.

OK. Do you remember a name of it?

No.

No. Was it right near the corral on this little knoll that comes . . . ? Was it on the same side of the road as the . . . ?

It was on the same side of the road as the corral, and it was before one would dip down into the town. So I'm trying to estimate, it seems to me that maybe it was a hundred feet before you got to the corral. It was on the same side of the highway as the corral.

And when you say that little hill went down into the town, was the mill built on that side of the hill then?

It was built on the road that was going into town, about a hundred feet before you hit that dip going into town, before you hit the house or the corral.

Oh, before that, so before the corral.

Yes, coming from Coaldale Junction.

And you could climb all up inside this mill? It wasn't locked or anything?

Oh, no, no. It was just rusty steel beams and that. And the other thing that we used to climb, and that we did have to either ride the horses or drive to, was the volcano. It was a cone, an ash cone. It was just fascinating because, as small as I was, that thing must have seemed like a whole mountain. And the view from the highway, the Coaldale Junction highway, was this perfectly round cone, but in the back of it, it had been blown out. So you could walk into the cone from the back without going all the way up to the top of the mountain. But it was just huge, and it was very steep and very hard.

And on the edge of the mountain were these little claims where the rocks would be built up, and inside the rocks would be a tin tobacco can with the claim information on it.

Did you ever open the cans and . . . ?

Yes, and put them back. And I'm trying to think. Harvey what's-his-name had a claim up there. [Harvey Humphrey.]

So you were allowed to climb all around there.

Yes, and go wherever we wanted to go—go over the top of the mountains, up the top of the mountain. There was a . . . I guess in Nevada one would call it a hill, but to me it was a mountain. And if we climbed over the top and down the other side, that's where town was. Or we would go around it. To me it seemed huge. It's probably just a tiny little hill. But there were snakes up there. And we'd go to the post office, and we'd go to town. And you'd have to be very careful when you were going over that hill. [laughter]

About the snakes?

Oh, yes. Yes.

Did you mostly spend time with your brothers, or were there other kids in town that you played with during the summer?

I can recall that there were a couple of girls. My grandmother put my hair up in curls with rags like Shirley Temple, because she was very popular at the time. She was a tiny, little girl in the movies, and everyone knew that that's how her mother took care of her hair. I can remember walking around with rags bouncing all over the place, and there was a little girl who did the same thing. They lived in a house that had a covered porch all the way around. She had horses, and I don't know how big the property was. It seemed very huge to me. But she had horses there, and I would take my horse, and she had sidesaddles. And her father would put these sidesaddles on the horses, and we would act like ladies and have these curly, bouncy curls. [laughter]

Did you wear skirts when you rode the horse with a sidesaddle? Do you remember what your outfit . . . ?

I think we did. Skirts were very important in those days, yes. And we would get on those and ride around the yard inside the fence. That was such exciting . . .

It sounds like this was a wealthier place than where your grandparents lived, with a porch all around and sidesaddles.

Oh, yes, they were. And I don't remember why, whether they were part of the mine or another enterprise.

You don't remember her name?

I'm trying to remember if this was the Humphrey family, because that was one family there. Harvey Humphrey, yes.

And this was his daughter that you played with, do you think?

It might have been.

Did their house have several rooms inside instead of one room like your grandparents?

I can only recall the outside. It was Victorian with the fancy porch.

Wood?

Oh, yes.

More than one story, do you recall?

I don't think so. A porch and then there was a yard with like a wooden picket fence around that.

And that's where you rode the horses sidesaddle?

Yes. Yes. Very unique for us to do that.

Were there any community activities, community potlucks or picnics or anything like that, that you did?

There were, always. And every Saturday night there was a dance in the bar, and these cowboys would come in and miners, I assume, and with great big boots. The kids, everybody came, and the band would play, and these people would stomp around. And my memory of that is that they were going to step right on top of me, and I was going to be squashed to death by these boots, because I didn't feel any higher than the boots were. [laughter] But it was community. Every Labor Day they had a huge parade and a fight. There was a famous boxing match there, and I don't recall who it was.

Were you there when that happened?

Yes. One Labor Day.

Did you go to it?

I believe . . . I believe I was there. I was in the parade, and a man named Harry Stimler and his wife were friends of my grandparents. He came by the house one time and left his felt hat, and that Labor Day my grandmother had that hat, and she cut it up and made moccasins out of it, Indian moccasins, and dressed me up like Little Beaver. And she took a cork and burned the cork and did my face all dark and everything and put on these Indian clothes for me. And I took Ace, the horse, the wild mustang, and they put a rope around his nose and up one side of the horse and put me on that horse bareback, and I rode in the parade. And I won. And when I went up to the stand—the bandstand was the same as the boxing ring, I think, they were all one. And people were cheering and clapping, and it scared the horse, and it started to rear up. I was holding

onto its mane to keep from sliding off the back end, and they thought that was part of the act, and so they cheered louder and louder. I was so scared I was going to fall off! And, finally, my dad came up and rescued me and took me off the horse. But I was trying so hard not to appear frightened, because I was so excited about all the cheering! I loved it! [laughter]

Did you win an award? Do you recall what you were presented for winning with the costume and the horse?

No. I don't recall that at all.

But that seemed to be the same time that the prizefight was held there?

Well, I don't know if it was the same year, but they always had a prizefight on Labor Day. It was kind of a big event where people came from all over the place. And I think Sarah [cousin, Sarah Grable] can tell you more about that because . . . I don't know why, but it was a very important fight one year.

So did Sarah spend summers with you, too? Your fathers were brothers.

We were talking about that when she called me to tell me that she was going to meet you. And she has memories that I have no memory of at all. But I think her family lived there with my grandparents in a house of their own, but after these experiences I am telling you about. I can remember driving up there with Sarah and her mother from Los Angeles one summer, but I can't recall which summer it was or how old we were or anything.

So her memories would come after yours?

Yes.

Yours were late 1930s, up to maybe 1940?

Yes. Nineteen forty-one, 1942, because I can remember going up there, too, during a part of the war years. And she's younger than I am, and I don't know how many years—probably three or four years younger than I am. So her memories are probably a little later than that.

And different, since her parents lived there in town and you only spent summers there.

Right. Yes.

And your summers there stopped when your grandparents moved to Gabbs, is that right? And they took the house with them?

Yes.

Do you remember any details about how they moved that?

No, because I wasn't there at the time. My memory was this one-room house. And then my next memory of the house was in Hawthorne where it was kitchen, dining room, living room, bedroom, bathroom.

So they had taken that one-room house, moved it first to Gabbs, then to Hawthorne, and added on.

Added each time on it. I did some research for a Toastmaster's speech on this, in that this was a common practice in Nevada, to take your house to each of the mining towns when they moved. And they would put it on the back of a flatbed. One of the courthouses, I'm trying to think if it was the Belmont courthouse or one of them, was moved three times.

Yes. And the reason being . . . ?

The reason being because that's the only place they'd have to live. No building materials available, and it was probably cheaper and took less time. And in those days the only foundations they had were just rocks, so they could just pick it up and put it on a flatbed truck. And these things were very small: these homes were very tiny. It's really interesting. [laughter]

Yes. Very interesting It sounds difficult to move a whole house, but if you figure it was only sixteen by twenty or smaller, perhaps, then it might have been easy to do that.

Nancy, . . . any other stories that you remember from that time?

I can remember on Saturday nights, and I don't know where the films came from, but we had movies. And the Northern store was the main building in town. [I don't know] whether they had a feed store next to it, but there was kind of like a shed, a big garage-type of thing, and everybody would bring a chair. They would set up a screen and play these cowboy movies, and I can remember watching old, old cowboy movies. The whole family would go and bring their own furniture, I mean, their own chairs to sit on in order to watch these. There was room inside the building for some people, but it would spread all the way out to the outside, and we watched the movies.

Does any particular movie come to mind? Do you remember a title or the stars in any of them?

Not a title. Gene Autry was the big star in those days. All I recall were cowboy movies, and maybe that's all we were allowed to go to. I have no idea, but that was really great.

Saturday nights were a big get-together for the community then, always.

Oh, yes. It certainly was. And I know we talked about this, but it wasn't my memory: it was told to me that at one point they didn't have any law. It was before they had a sheriff or anything, and my father was a bartender. He told me that when someone really got drunk and rowdy, and they were worried about him, they would . . . the whole town would take care of it by grabbing this person and tying him to a telegraph pole until he sobered up. And that was how they took care of the rowdy people. And then they'd let them loose as soon they sobered up.

You were born in L.A., but your parents did live in Silver Peak for a few years. And your brothers, were they born there?

[I don't know where my brothers were born. The family lived there] for a while before I was born, yes. And my brothers were five and seven years older than I was, so also they lived there. They were living there at the time, and I assume my father was bartending and working at the mine, probably.

Silver Peak made such a big impression on you as a child. Have you thought about why that is? You've got very clear images and pictures in your mind of that time.

I believe it's because of the contrast of the wintertime living in suburban Los Angeles, living in the big city, and then going up to this total freedom where no one worried about you in any way, shape, or form. You just went and did whatever you wanted to do.

And you couldn't do that in Los Angeles in the 1930s?

Of course not. And I'm not talking about crime, but your parents worried about you getting lost; your parents worried about you being hit by a car. There were all kinds of

concerns in a city in comparison to out here. I'm sure that there were dangers in Silver Peak, too, that no one thought about. [laughter] I look back on it now, and I think, "How did I live through it?" [laughter]

Sure, you were getting tossed off of a horse every day! [laughter]

Every day. And climbing on rusty beams thirty feet in the sky, but one never thought about things like that. And running around in a corral full of cows.

Did kids get hurt? Do you remember any accidents with kids?

I don't remember any accidents. I don't remember any serious things that happened.

. . . that required a doctor or an emergency trip to another town or anything?

No. No. The only time I remember going into Tonopah was when my grandmother wanted to make me a pair of pajamas. And I didn't know how to tell her . . . in those days you had to be poor to sew for yourself. Otherwise, you went to the store and bought. I didn't have an appreciation of someone's skills and talents in those days. And she took me to the general store in Tonopah to buy material to make these pajamas, and in the middle of the store I burst out crying, and she asked me what was wrong. And I said, "I don't want you to make me pajamas. I want you to buy me pajamas." And she just laughed at me, and she *made* me pajamas: she did not buy them. [laughter]

She taught me how to bake bread, and I was a good bread baker for a long, long time. I've forgotten how to do it now, because I haven't done it for so long. But I did. I learned to do it, and I could make bread by

myself. And there was no recipe. You had to know how many handfuls of flour to use, and how many pinches of salt, and everything else. And I could do that very well.

That was quite an art at that time.

Definitely. And they certainly didn't consider it an art. It was just a chore to them.

There was no bakery? Everybody made their own bread?

Evidently. I don't recall a bakery at all. I'm sure they must have had something, because the store did carry groceries, and we bought groceries. And I remember one time being there.

The Gilberts owned a clothing store at one point in time—Hank and somebody Gilbert. And they had broomstick skirts for sale one time. Now, I don't know how far back that takes me, but broomstick skirts were skirts that, if you spread them out, they would make a perfect circle. In order to sell them, they would put them around these broomsticks, and they would sell the broom and the skirt at the same time, with the skirt wrapped around the broomstick.

Were they similar to the broomstick skirts today where they have that crinkle look, or was it a different kind of broomstick? The skirt was smooth, in a circle?

I don't recall what it was like. The thing that impressed me most was the fact that, if you laid them flat on the ground, they made the perfect circle and that they came on a stick.

It was fun shopping in their store. That store was separate from the Northern, from the grocery store. The Northern evidently was a chain. They must have gone from mining town to mining town, because the

Northern was known throughout Nevada as the general store.

What else was downtown? A clothing store, the Northern grocery store . . .

A bar.

A bar where you went for Saturday night dances?

Yes.

A post office?

I remember an old fellow named Tom Whyte lived in this little shack, and part of it was made from bottles, if you're familiar with the bottle house. It was like that. I looked for that last summer when I was there, and I couldn't even find town. But . . .

You went back last summer? For what purpose?

Yes. Memories. I wanted to see it. To see if anything was there.

Was there? Could you locate anything?

No. No, I couldn't locate anything, except the volcano was still there. [laughter] Other than that, I didn't recognize anything.

The town is no longer laid out the way it was?

I couldn't even find the hill.

Oh, really? Where your grandfather's house and dairy was?

Right. Couldn't find anything. There was a swimming pool. I don't know whether that swimming pool was the same one that

eventually was built in Silver Peak when I was there or whether it's another one. I have no idea. But now it's just a mass of The town, what's left of it, is a mass of willows and cottonwoods and trailers. And when I lived there, there were homes. They were shacks, but they were houses built of wood or some material.

And trailer homes have replaced those?

Yes. And I don't recall a cemetery there when I used to go there, but I did visit the cemetery last summer.

Did you recognize any of the names on the gravestones?

I didn't have the opportunity to spend a lot of time. I didn't find any names that I recognized. And a lot of it was much later, I believe. But I love cemeteries; I have pictures of cemeteries all over the place.

I want to go back to your grandparents' house. Did your grandmother have a garden, do you recall? Or did she buy most of her food from the store?

She didn't have a garden that I recall, and I don't think there was room for one. She may have had some flowers around the house, but I don't recall a vegetable garden of any kind there . . . a food garden. No.

Did your grandmother work, or did she stay at home?

She stayed at home, worked at home cooking, baking. And also, the small towns had organizations, and I'm sure that the women were very active with one another doing things, because with less than a hundred people in a town, there wasn't anyone you did not know. I'm sure that it was a very close community. And that was

the women's job, was to be a part of that community.

Do you recall your grandmother being involved? Did she go to some sort of a women's group meetings or anything like that?

No, I don't recall that at all.

But you're just assuming that there must have been some volunteer organizations to help with something.

Not even as organized as that. Simply knowing what to do. Part of the job is . . . of the woman of the household in those days to me, my impression was that one took care of each other, no matter what they had to do. And it didn't have to be through an organization to do that.

So they might get together and can vegetables or sew or . . . Is that the kind of thing?

They might get together and, if someone were sick, make sure they had food, make sure they took care of them. If maybe someone in the mines died or something, that the funeral be taken care of. Everybody would make sure things were OK—the children were taken care of, that sort of thing.

So you had a real sense of that when you were there as a child.

Oh, yes. Yes.

That there was a support group all around you?

Yes. Oh, yes.

And the women were primarily in charge of that?

You bet. My grandmother taught me how to say my prayers at night and would not let me go to sleep until I did. [laughter]

Was there a church, or was the main source of religion through family, like your grandmother?

There might have been a church, but I know that we never attended.

Other people have said that they don't recall a church, but one person remembered a traveling preacher who came through town.

Oh, really?

Yes. So that's why I wondered if the women were also sort of in charge of making sure children learned about spiritual faith.

Yes. My grandmother came from a Mormon background. My grandfather, I don't believe, did. He ended up in Utah because his parents were getting away from the Union army, since they came from the South. Evidently, his older brothers stole horses from the Union army, and they had to get out of town when they lived in Kentucky, and that's how they ended up in Utah.

So the Civil War sent him west, his family.

The carpetbaggers sent him west, really. It was long after the Civil War, but it was during when the North still had a lot of power in the South. And then my grandmother's people, the Lawsons, immigrated from Wales.

They were Welsh, is that correct?

Yes, Welsh. They were Welsh, I believe. And I don't know how they became Mormons, but they lived in Salt Lake City

for a very long time. My great grandparents were in their nineties when they passed away and were very active in the church. But my grandfather just could not stay away from prospecting. He *had* to be a prospector. And they lived in Manhattan. They lived in Goldfield. They followed the mother lodes. He would get a job that would support them, and then he would look for gold and silver in his spare time.

Did your grandmother ever talk about how she felt following him around as a miner?

I don't think she ever felt she had an opinion about that. My grandmother's sister was a very wealthy lady in Salt Lake City and very derisive of my grandfather, because he had this "gold fever," she called it. And my grandmother always defended him, so I'm sure that she was happy with him. They always appeared to be happy together. [laughter]

So she was doing something a little different in her family, it seems like.

Oh, yes.

Anything else that you think we need to cover in your memories? We talked about community and spirituality and being taught homemaking skills by your grandmother and the freedom to just be a kid and explore.

I think that part of my life, the reason why it's so important to me, is because that is what made me what I am now.

In what way?

Women were boxed in, in those days. But that freedom gave me the opportunity to think in a different way and to make decisions I may not have been able to make

had I not had that experience [in Silver Peak].

Can you give me an example of what you mean by that, of thinking in a different way?

I never had the feeling that I People I've talked to that are the same generation that I am, we always talk about how boxed in we were in the 1950s when we were growing up and making decisions. And I found that a lot of them never had this—I never had the feeling that there was something I couldn't do because I was a woman. It never occurred to me. And my father and my mother were very traditional people, so I don't believe it came directly from them. I believe it came from that experience of being with my brothers and doing what they did and having the freedom to do all those things and not having someone say, "You can't do that. You're a young lady. You must behave this way." And I think that's the experience that made it different for me than it did for many people in my generation.

So, as you put this in perspective for yourself, that's part of why that seems such an important time and why it's so clear in your mind.

Yes. I think that's why I cling to it so much, that part of the past, because I've had other terrific experiences. But when it comes to talking to people, that's the very period that I always go back to, is the Silver Peak time. It's great.

Back to the childhood years. That's interesting because everybody has a turning point in their life, or several, and it sounds like you had one early on.

I didn't know it at that time, but

You just assumed every child had wonderful summers in Silver Peak with Grandma and Grandpa! [laughter]

Yes. I did. I assumed every child had a horse. And it was really brought home to me when I got married, and my husband was from the East, and we went to Philadelphia. I would relate these stories to these people, and they would look at me like, "This lady is lying. This lady is not telling the truth. Nobody does those things. Nobody can do that." And that's when I realized I'd had a unique experience—that it was different than most people. And had I not had that opportunity, to spend my summers that way and live in Los Angeles and grow up in the city, how much I would have missed!

Right. You had a real contrast.

Oh, yes.

To be growing up and going to school in such a large city, and then the total freedom of a tiny town like Silver Peak.

And that's why I live right here this very day, in Carson City, is that I've had the experience of the large metropolitan area and the rural areas, and I choose this even over Reno. Or as a matter of fact, I think Silver Peak would be a neat town to retire to. [laughter]

Would you? You'd like to go back?

Something small like Tonopah, Goldfield, Silver Peak, yes.

Have you gone back other than last year when you went back looking for memories? Did you have any other opportunities?

Probably that was the first time, and when I taught school in Hawthorne for a

while. I was about twenty then, and I think I took a trip back then with a friend for a day. And that was the last time I was there until last summer.

So that would have been forty years, do you think?

Yes. Lost track of the time. That's right.

It's just not recognizable to you now.

Right. And when we went back, we stopped . . . I'm really bad with names. I have a terrible time with names. There were two brothers mining the Argentite Mine down there, and they took us through the mine. They were really torn because it was the first day of hunting season, and we said, "But we want to go through the mine."

They said, "We were just leaving to go hunting." They postponed their hunting trip to take us through the mine, and that was really exciting for us.

This was last year, or this was when you were teaching in Hawthorne?

This was when I was teaching in Hawthorne. Yes.

That would have been 1958, in the 1950s, if you were twenty?

No. It would be probably 1954, something like that.

So it was an operating mine at that point when you went through it.

Oh, yes. I wish I could remember the brothers' names.

Yes. I'm struck by how many . . . there are certain names of families that stayed in the Silver Peak area or intermarried, and they were real key families in that area.

Yes. Oh, yes.

Well, Nancy, thank you very much. This is very valuable information. I appreciate you taking the time to share your memories with me.

It has been very exciting for me, too.

SARAH GRABLE

SARAH GRABLE was a granddaughter to Lloyd and Martha Mount, who lived in Silver Peak in the 1930s and owned the dairy there. Sarah is a first cousin to Nancy Adams and Keith Mount, and with different fathers, the three children experienced Silver Peak quite differently. While Nancy and Keith were free to roam at will during their summer visits, Sarah received stricter training in proper etiquette for a girl. She attended elementary school in Silver Peak, and a special treat was to go prospecting with her grandfather.



VICTORIA FORD: Today is August 22, 1996, and I am with Sarah Grable in Carson City in her home. We are going to be talking about Silver Peak. Let's start with the factual things. Where and when were you born?

SARAH GRABLE: August 4, 1936 in Pasadena, California.

When you were born, were your grandparents already in Nevada?



Yes, both mother and dad were living in Silver Peak.

So how did you end up being born in California?

My maternal grandparents objected to their first grandchild and only daughter's child being born in such a horrible place.

Oh, they had real strong feelings about their daughter being there.

And they asked her to come back to California, and I was born there. And she stayed there for . . . and Dad came down. He went back and forth, but he was there in Los Angeles, actually. For a couple of years we were there, possibly up to my third birthday, somewhere in there.

Somewhere in there you went back then with your parents to Silver Peak. OK. You're talking about a real strong objection. Let's go into that a little bit. How did you as a child begin to understand that your maternal grandparents didn't approve of your mom and you being in Silver Peak?

I don't know, because there was no anger. There was no antagonism. There was no good or bad. It was just [that] they were Southerners, had come to California during the Depression. My maternal grandfather was an executive with AT&T and had nice things. And he would look at this horrible desert and the cows and the dirt and the bugs and think, "You can't raise a child there, and there's not adequate schooling." And so, I don't think it was anger, it was just, that wasn't a proper thing to do, and they were very proper people.

But what it meant for you then is that you went back and forth quite a bit, so that you wouldn't be in Silver Peak all the time?

Right.

Can you describe how that worked?

We would get in a car, and I would get carsick going between Silver Peak and L.A. It was a twisty dirt road. Now, I don't know how twisty, but to me it seems real twisty. Then we got in the car, and we'd just drive down to California and would stay there for . . . not in the winter. I don't remember winters in California. Summers. And I don't know if it was like two weeks, two months,

but it was quite a period of time, because pictures of me were there during . . . planting the flowers, and the flowers were in bloom.

OK. And did your mother stay with you during that time, or did you go by yourself?

It would depend. It would be either way. Mom and Dad would go, or I would stay there, or they would both be there. It was all happy. There was never any problem. And my paternal grandparents and maternal grandparents liked each other, because my maternal grandmother was very, very refined. And the Mounts were refined, too. Grandpa Mount was from a very nice family, and Grandmother Mount was complete dignity. She was really a neat lady. So it wasn't the people—never objecting to the people or the quality of people. It was just that desert and school and dirt.

And they wanted you to have more than that.

My mother was a musician and had been a classical musician, and I was being deprived of those things.

Not much chance for a classical musician out in Silver Peak in the 1930s?

No. No piano.

She didn't have a piano in your house?

No. No. And she had always played on a grand piano. Now whether she went downtown someplace and played the piano, I don't know.

OK. You started to describe your paternal grandparents, the Mount family. Can you tell me a little bit more about them?

As I understand and what I've been told, the Mounts were out of Kentucky. Great-grandfather Mount (and I don't know, I believe his name was Fletcher, but I'm not sure) was a U.S. Marshal and was sent to Nevada to clean up the Mormon bigamy.

Oh, really?

And he went [to] Richfield, Utah.

About when would this have been?

Well, it was my great-grandfather, so it had to be right there at the turn of the century.

The Mounts had property in Fish Lake Valley, but somehow they got into Richfield. [Note: Chronicler briefly confuses generational stories, but then corrects between the great-grandfather and the grandfather.] And Grandmother was there—her parents had come from Scotland. They were good Mormons. And he fell in love with Grandma, which I guess was a major disgrace, because here he is [his father was] out there to clean up the bigamy. And there's this Mormon girl. And the family . . . I never knew his family. Grandma's family, I met all of the aunts. And Nancy does know them better.

You're mentioning Nancy, and that's Nancy Adams who is your cousin, and we've also interviewed her.

They were very active in the Mormon church and remained very active in the Mormon church. Grandma did not, but had the children's (now I don't know whether it's baptism) names put in the records. And then she lived . . . then Grandmother went with Grandpa.

Which would have been Lloyd. And your grandmother's name was . . .

Martha Lawson. And I got that confused, if you didn't . . .

I noticed . . . so these are grandparents, not great-grandparents.

Yes, I got mixed up because great-grandfather came out apparently with his wife, because he had the boys. And Lloyd Mount met Martha who was the Mormon girl. They're my grandparents.

OK. So the great-grandfather came out to solve bigamy problems, but his son fell in love with the Mormon girl.

Right.

And then she, of course, left her family and went off to follow her husband to the mining field, is that right?

And they went . . . my dad, Ward Fletcher Mount, was born in Ely. And then he lived in Goldfield and then in Silver Peak. And then [he] went to California, because my paternal grandfather had a trucking firm, contracting, installing the light standards in Los Angeles. And Dad was down there, and that's where he met Mother.

So your grandparents weren't always in the mining area, then. Your grandfather did some other things.

He was a contractor.

Contractor, installing all the electrical standards, which is for the street lights. And so that sounds like a very lucrative project.

Very lucrative. Dad went to private schools. He drove a (now watch me get this one wrong) a LaSalle or an Auburn or one of those snazzy automobiles, and this was

Depression time. And he got a job in a laundry. Now he was eighteen or nineteen, and he made five dollars a week, so consequently they were wealthy. I mean he was wealthy, plus his parents were making good money. But on his own he had this money to support this car.

And is that about when your parents met?

That's when Mom and Dad met.

So when your mom met him, he was a wealthy young man in L.A.

I don't know wealthy, but well-to-do. I understand, and I don't know, but they went bankrupt at some point, because they did live very high on the hog.

Was it just because they lived high on the hog, or was it the Depression that hit? Do you know?

My family, my maternal and paternal grandparents, never ever spoke of a hard time during the Depression. And I was surprised that I was born during the Depression, because I hear people tell these stories, and they say how hard it was. Well, there was none of that, and I was never aware of any hardship. And it could be a family that didn't complain, or else there was no hardship.

So you don't know which it was—whether they just didn't talk about it, kept it to themselves, or there was always enough money in the family?

And it could be that Grandfather with the trucking . . . because he was a miner—it was in his blood—that when he had that money, he was throwing it back into the mines, because they did not mine solely to get rich. They mined for the money, but if

you hear them talk about it, it was the glory of finding the gold.

Do you remember your grandfather?

Yes. Oh, yes. I remember Grandpa.

Could you quote something that he said, that he would have been likely to say about mining, about the glory of the mining?

No, just how exciting, and when we would get in the truck. He had a . . . I don't know. It was an old Ford truck, and it's called, "Dynamite." It was painted red and had big, hard tires, and he had a grub box. And if you were lucky enough to go with him and the dog, you went out and you looked for gold. It was just an exciting thing to do, and he would always come back with gold hunks. And there were some pretty big hunks at times.

Like how big?

My little finger. They were pretty good size.

Bigger than a pencil eraser.

Oh, yes. He had a key chain that was spectacular.

So he knew something about mining then.

Oh, he was an expert. He knew mining. There might even be documentation at the university. Now in the . . . let's see, 1957, 1958, 1959, he went to the university, and they would give him students. He took them mining, because while they were learning with equipment and learning mapping, he could take them on the mountain and say, "Look at that mountain. These colors indicate this. Let's go look, and this is what we will find."

So he could really give them the sense of prospecting, it sounds like.

And I'm sure those records are up there in the college of mines.

OK. But he did not go to college to learn mining?

No.

It was all what he had picked up and learned on his own through his love of it.

Right. And it was love. And he would, in his seventies, get in that truck and go, and Grandmother would worry. But everybody felt that with the dog—the dog would come home if anything happened. And so he really liked it. And at one point he had a uranium mine. And again, this is family

These are family stories, not things that you knew firsthand?

And I do not know about this, but right before Charlie Steen hit big with the uranium, Grandfather had found a uranium mine. The Jones family in Las Vegas did some financing on it, and Grandpa lost out on whatever happened there, because he just got gypped out of it. He was not a uranium person. But I can remember them talking about taking a big financial loss on that one.

And that would have been later on?

1952. Somewhere in there. See, I don't remember mining in the Peak. I remember the dairy at the Peak, but the mine was . . . now, again, Nancy Mount, cousin, said the mining operation was across the street. I remember everything directly behind the dairy.

I remember going down the mining chute, and you didn't go You didn't get

caught to begin with, because you weren't supposed to be there. And you couldn't go up, because there were splinters if you go up, so you had to come down. And there was a metal divider that, I guess, only smaller rocks if they went through and then they'd come in and chip I don't know why, but there was a divider somewhere in that chute that if you didn't lay down quick you could cut your head off. So you had to come down quick and lay down to get under this.

It was a wonderful slide for kids, but very dangerous.

Very dangerous.

And it was off limits?

Absolutely off limits.

But you remember going down there? How did you manage that?

Nancy.

Nancy was the culprit behind that?
[laughter]

Whether I went with anybody else, I don't know. But Nancy was, what, two years older than I am, so she was a big kid. And when she was around, I would go down the slide. Now that could have been two or three times, I don't remember. But it was a very, very daring thing to go sneak up there and go down that slide.

So I remember the mining there, so I know the Mounts were mining in that area. And I don't know how they did that, in conjunction with the dairy or whether that's why my dad was there running the dairy, because they were mining.

OK. And when you describe this, was it a mill, or was it a mine where you went down the chute?

I don't know. To me it was a mine. That was the gold mine. That was it. And that's where they went to get the gold. And if I think about it, I probably would say, "Gee, I want this or that."

And they would say, "Well, we have to go get the gold." So that's just in mind.

And people will say mill, and I think, "No, it was a mine." But I don't remember a hole or anything where they were mining. So it could have been a mill.

It could have been a mill instead. But it was very close to where the dairy was, and the dairy is what you remember. You didn't ever see them mining, did you, although you went out prospecting with your grandfather in the truck?

Right, but I don't remember any action. I don't remember any noise, any pounding, anything like that.

OK. And you don't remember him going off to work with a lunch pail or something to go to the mine or anything?

No, because he never worked like that. The Mounts were not people who worked for anybody. They just didn't work for other people. They ran their own businesses. And until Nancy's dad was . . . he must have been in his fifties, I think, he was always self-employed. They had the lumberyard in Hawthorne. I mean, there was always a deal . . . They took all the railroad tracks out of between (now I want to say Hawthorne, but I could be wrong with that) all the way to Goldfield. That's why there is no railroad there. The Mounts took that railroad and opened the lumberyard in Hawthorne.

I see. So when the railroad stopped functioning, they got the ties and opened the lumberyard with those, and that was

another way that they started the business. OK.

They always had a business going.

And that would have been your father and your uncle?

That would have been Uncle and Grandpa. And at that time, my dad was a contractor in Vegas and a very well-respected contractor.

And then I wanted to tie this in, you mentioned that your grandfather was always involved in politics wherever he went. Can you say a little more about that, because he was active in Nevada? And then I want to go back to your childhood memories.

Always active. And he performed the first wedding in Gabbs, and that's in the book that's been written on Gabbs. He was the justice of the peace. Now, what they did prior to that, politically, I don't know. I think they were active in union-type situations in southern California because of some of the people I met when I was older. So there was that, politically, and it came through the union-type activity, which seemed strange because they were so independent in contracting, but they were very much Democrats in their thinking.

So there was some connection to union work?

And union people. In Mineral County, Grandfather was elected to the Nevada State Legislature.

Do you know what years those were?

In the early 1950s.

1950s. And that's Lloyd Mount, so we'll be able to track that, I'm sure, in government documents.

And it's in the statutes, when he died and all the awards and things. And Keith Mount, Nancy's dad, was also in state legislature. And they were in Lion's Club. Always active. Always community.

OK. How about your dad?

My dad was different. He was gentle—didn't even kill a fly. You'd shoo the flies outside. We had a rattlesnake in the house one day, and somebody was going to get a hoe to kill it, and he said, "No, we'll get it outside." My best memory of him . . . but I was so angry. I was eleven or twelve and had a lovely birthday with my very nice girlfriends in Las Vegas and a beautiful cake, and it was just so special. And here he came with these little children over from the poor side of Las Vegas, who didn't have an opportunity to go to birthday parties or have lovely birthday cakes, and they all came to my party.

And you didn't like that?

I didn't like it until I got older, and I thought, "What a marvelous man!" Christmas, he went out and bought for poor people. And I didn't find that out for a long time . . . Well, I didn't find it out. There were many toys that we never saw. Now, we never did without, so it didn't hurt us, but I knew there were toys he had, and we didn't get them. So it occurred to me as I grew up, he had been doing these things for people. And when Vegas went into a recession, he kept all of his employees on the payroll the best he could.

This is when he was a contractor?

Yes. There was one time when they went out on strike. The truckers went out on strike, and the people wouldn't cross the picket line. So he sent my mother shopping and filled the back of the pickup with food and delivered to all of his employees. So he was different. He was very, very gentle and very good.

OK. And he was different in personality then from his brother and maybe also from his father? His brother and father were more similar in personality?

More aggressive, more outgoing, and Dad was just caring and gentle. And he made tremendous quantities of money. Gave away . . .

All of it . . . most of it?

Mother would have to say, "Hey, I got bills."

"Oh, yeah." But it was never that we did without. We had a lovely home, and we had nice things. But again, that was the Mounts. They were not particularly money motivated. They were success motivated. Their feeling of success didn't equate directly to money. And Uncle Keith, Keith Mount, and my dad were twelve years apart. There had been another child in between who died in Goldfield.

Oh, as a child?

Infant.

As an infant. So that's quite an age difference.

So there was a big age difference there. And Uncle Keith was very much like Grandfather, his dad. My dad was very much like his mother.

When your family moved to Silver Peak, what was your first memory of Silver Peak?

Getting a pair of electric scissors.

Electric scissors? Describe those.

They looked like an electric shaver, except they were bright yellow, and they had red on them. And then they had two blades that were about an inch and a half to two inches. You plug that thing in and those scissors would cut. I was left-handed, so I was not able to cut.

Oh, with scissors. So where did these come from? In Silver Peak?

I think they came from Gilbert's store.

And you were talking about . . . what was Gilbert's store?

A mercantile.

Clothing, that type of thing?

And I believe it was Gilbert's. I mean, that just flashed in right now.

Wow, that was a big thing to a left-handed child who hadn't been able to cut paper dolls or anything like that.

Right. Because when I cut, I would tear. I got those, and I can see myself in the middle of the floor (which could not have been the middle of the floor, because you had to plug those in) . . . and having paper and cutting up that paper.

So the first memory really wasn't about Silver Peak but this wonderful contraption that you found in Silver Peak. What else do you remember as a child, because you were there, you said, from what ages?

From probably closer to three to, well, right before third grade. Somewhere, it could have been partly through the second grade, but right into the third grade.

So about four or five years at the most?

I remember the horses coming to the back door to eat.

At your parents' house? Will you describe that to me?

There was a dutch-type door, double door, slit middle.

Split on the top and bottom, in half. OK.

You can open just the top half or the bottom half, or you can connect them and open them both. And we'd open the top half, probably to begin with for ventilation, and the horses would come there, and you could feed them carrots.

And they would just stick their nose right in the door?

In the door.

Were these your horses?

I don't know. We talk about the wild horses now. At that time, people turned their horses out and then went and gathered them back up.

So it was hard to distinguish whether these were wild or they belonged to someone.

Yes. I don't think they were wild. They were gentle, or they had been broken. Now, if they were our horses at that point, I don't know.

OK. How big was the house that your folks lived in? Can you remember it?

I remember the house, and I remember it big. But I look at the picture—it was not very big. Very, very small. You came in the one door, and there was the living room. And then, directly behind that was the kitchen, and it was partially concealed so you couldn't see the sink, but it wasn't completely. It was like it kind of just had been partitioned off, so you wouldn't be looking at dirty dishes when you came in the front door. And there was a bedroom to the left toward the front of the living room. And then the other side . . . well, it was rectangular. So some way you went into the one bedroom from that way, and the other one you went in that way.

So what you're pointing to is that maybe you, for example, might have gone into the one bedroom from the living room, but then to get into the other bedroom, you had to continue on through there into the second bedroom. It didn't have a separate entrance?

I can't remember one. And I can't remember where the bathroom was.

Was there an indoor bathroom?

Yes. There had to have been an indoor bathroom. Maybe there wasn't.

Maybe there wasn't, because Nancy said that at your grandparents' house there was not.

There was not. And then out front, there was a tree stump. And there was never a tree there where the tree stump [was]. The tree stump had to have been hauled in. And grandmother would chop the chickens' heads off with her little ax.

This is in front of your parents' house or in front of your grandparents' house?

They were kind of L-shaped, and there wasn't a huge distance between those two.

So they were very close neighbors.

They were close, and Grandmother would go out there and chop those heads off those chickens.

With an ax?

Yes. And I'm sure that when I wasn't around, she didn't let the chickens flop. But when I was there, she would let the chickens flop.

Why do you say that she did it when you were there?

I think she was just tickled with my reaction.

What was that?

Probably giggly, trying to figure it out. I can remember her hypnotizing the chickens. If you run your finger . . . I don't know how you do it now. You put their head down, and you move your finger back and forth, you can hypnotize a chicken, and they will just stay there. And I can remember giggling at that. That was really neat. And so my reaction to the chickens must have been something that was cute, because she would have never let the chickens flop around. That was not her nature.

You remember that your grandmother cleaned chickens then. Did she raise the chickens?

They raised them there and had eggs, and the dairy was there. They milked the cows.

Do you remember how many cattle?

When I'd look into the pen or the corral, I can see four feeding stations. And then I can see like six places in the back where they would have walked the cows in head first.

Like the stations where they'd stand while they were milked. So there weren't a lot of cows?

No, there was not. But there were a lot of cows around, and they weren't always in the pen. And I've been thinking about this, why would that be? I mean, you don't run a dairy with six cows or whatever. It could be that, because I was allowed to feed the babies, what I remember were the mother cows. And so the mother cows were confined, and the babies were there. I don't remember the whole herd.

That the others might have been out roaming or whatever?

Right, or there could have been another corral or some other way that they had them there.

But you remember the mothers and the babies?

Well, that's only thinking about it—that's why it would have been so small, because you're not going to have a dairy and be transporting milk in big containers with six or seven cows.

Do you remember the big containers?

I think I remember them, but . . .

And the milk cans?

The big milk cans. They were as big as I am. Well, not as [big as now] . . . They were very big. And you see them in all the stores now where they paint them, and

they're fashionable. I remember those. I have no idea how the milk got in them, but I know there were hoses connected to the pasteurizer.

So when you remember, they were pasteurizing the milk?

Or they were moving it through some sort of machine, and there was a hose. There were hoses connected to them.

But they were milking by hand.

They were milking by hand.

Did you ever milk the cows?

I milked a lot of cows. Never got any milk. [laughter] Couldn't figure out how to do that. And then Grandfather or Dad would come by and squirt milk in my mouth for me. But I couldn't do that.

And I remember, "Don't stand behind a cow. They could kick." But if you were in the front, you weren't in any danger from the cow. So if you'd get to the front of the cow, you were OK.

OK. So you could hang around and watch them milk, and you could try it out if you wanted to.

And the children weren't a bother. I don't ever remember being run off or frightened.

What you're describing sounds like, whatever was going on, you were just a part of it. I mean, they kind of shared with you what they were doing.

And if you ran out in the desert, I don't ever remember being . . . The only time I was ever in fear was sliding down this mine thing. And that was an absolute no-no, so that must have been extreme danger. I

could run in the desert. I could pick up lizards, tarantulas. I knew what a scorpion was, to stay away. But I've never been afraid of scorpions. So however they handled that You just grew up. And I remember being taught never to reach on top of the rocks, because snakes get out and warm. The rattlers are above, and if you reach, you be above and look—don't ever reach overhead where you can't see what's laying there. And that was not fear, it was just, "Be smart. Don't go doing dumb things, because there are rattlesnakes."

Because you were pretty young. You were talking about being between three and eight. So your parents and grandparents taught you some really important survival skills at a very young age—how to avoid rattlesnakes, how to keep yourself safe.

That's interesting. I had never thought about that, but that was the miner. He's out there wandering through the rocks, and you certainly wouldn't want to worry about a child doing something stupid.

And so, if you were going to go along, you were going to have to learn some of these skills. And they were probably things that he had learned to protect himself.

And they weren't taught in a sense that you were given a lecture.

But just as you went along?

You somehow . . . yes.

And does it seem to you that you learned more from your grandfather, the miner, than from your father?

Oh, yes.

Was your father doing any mining during this time?

No. Not that I know.

What was he doing?

He had to have been doing the dairy. If he did any mining, it would have been simply because they needed help. He would not have done that out of choice.

Nancy talks about coming to Silver Peak to stay for the summers with her grandparents. Were you there when she was there?

I had to have been there, because I remember Nancy, but I don't remember a lot about Nancy. I remember the boys more, because they were older and they were boys.

Were you an only child?

No. I had a brother, younger.

Was he in Silver Peak, too?

No. He's what, ten years younger than I am, so

OK. So it would have been you and Nancy and her two older brothers. But you might not have been there the whole time?

But I don't know how . . . no. See, that's why there would have been a short memory of it. I remember Keith Mount, the one you're going to talk to. His younger brother, Bob—only vague recollections. But they're very close, so they had to both be there.

So you were pretty young.

Yes.

On the other hand, though, you were not there just for the summers. You were there year-round. So did you go to school?

I went to school at the Silver Peak School, and I started school too young. Now, there was no kindergarten at that time. It was first through, I would say, sixth grade. But I don't know that. I was the only child that was young, so they figured, "Well, why doesn't she just go to school for the companionship." I don't know if I went full-day or how that was divided up, but I was, I think, four. I don't think I was five. I was quite young. And I got to go [to] the school, and it was a scary place. I did like it, but I was scared. It was very big, and there were a lot of kids. The boys . . . because there were two buildings. And between the two buildings there was an outhouse. And the big boys would tell me if I went in there, that they would either throw me in or I would fall down the hole. And I was scared to death of that fact. I was scared of the teacher. I wasn't scared of the teacher in the sense that she was vicious or mean or ugly. I was just very young and wanting to play.

OK. So you were talking about being at least a little in awe of the teacher.

. . . of the teacher, because she would stand up front. And whatever your grade was, or however she divided the learning task, you were not to look when it wasn't your class time to look. And the boards, as I recall the boards, slid. Just thinking about it, I will say there were three boards. But somehow those boards would slide around behind each other, so only one was visible, or only one had schoolwork on it. And why it seems to me there were three boards, is it seems we were divided into three groups. And when your board was visible, that was what you learned. And if you were in the younger or the older [group], or however it was, if it wasn't your turn to have board work, she would hit you with this long pointer that she used. Now, I never got hit, and I don't know if she hit hard, or whether she just tapped somebody on the hand or

what really happened, so I had a little bit of fear or respect for not ever looking up when it wasn't my turn to look up.

That's kind of how she kept control of all these different grades, evidently.

Apparently, when you did your board work, and then you had your desk work. And I used . . .

I'm sorry to interrupt, but do you remember her name?

I think it was Mrs. Chiatovich or Miss Chiatovich. It would have been Miss Chiatovich. I used to think that we had a slate, but I don't think we had a slate, because we had ink wells. And I was left-handed. And you had the wooden pens that you put your own points in. And because being left-handed—the ink, I would drag my hand down the paper, so therefore I couldn't do anything, because I smeared whatever I had done. No matter how well I had done it, I smeared it. And she gave me a blotter, so I could write and move that blotter down. And for a very young child, I had nice . . . I could do the fancy . . . what's it called?

Cursive?

No, it wasn't cursive. It was a fancy S, and it had the calligraphy look. And then you would make circles and circles and circles. And the paper had the three (I hadn't thought about that in years, but I can remember that now) . . . the two heavy lines and the light line through the middle.

And that's how you practiced the pen writing.

You did the circles and the straight lines, and then you connected. You did the circles and connected, which you were making a

small “a.” But you kept going through that, and that was an exercise that we did.

Do you remember learning to read there?

Yes.

How did you do that?

Phonics. We had songs that we sang. We sang “A, B, C, D.” We did phonics. You sound it out. And I don’t remember anybody ever getting reprimanded for sounding out or scolded or made to feel bad. If you sounded it out right, and you sounded all the letters, I can remember that was good. Even though the word might not quite . . . you didn’t get to the word, it was OK just to make all the sounds. I don’t remember the books. I know it wasn’t Dick and Jane, because I went into a California school for a short period, a couple of months, and they had Dick and Jane.

And you hadn’t had that before?

And I had not had it. And I thought it was really . . . what would a little kid think? Something really silly. It was strange, because it was very big words. It was very big pictures. So maybe we had the *McGuffey Reader* which was more reading.

More normal-sized words and normal pictures that you would see in adult books?

Right. Right. Not Dick saw Jane, or Spot jumped over the whatever. And I thought that was strange, because nothing was of the right size.

I never learned to print. I started out writing. That’s what you did: you write. I don’t think the children learned. I was in the youngest class. Never did print. I learned to print in college.

I want to go back to the thing about being sort of terrorized by the big boys. How did you handle that? Do you remember how that ever got resolved?

No. I think I just was scared all the time. And I know at one point I got scared. Now I don’t know if they had threatened me, or they were behind me walking to school, or if I was walking home, or how it happened. But I can remember running like a son of a gun and falling over a clump of rocks and opening up both knees that were really, really bad.

Skinned your knees?

More than skinning. I took skin off. I was just pouring blood, so I was afraid of them.

You talked about your grandmother’s cure for everything. What did she put on your skinned knees?

She used pure lanolin, which stinks unbelievably, and she would put Lysol in the pure lanolin. And whatever you had, that was it.

Yes. And so did that hurt when she put it on?

I’m sure just the soap and water that washed it to begin with would have hurt more than the lanolin.

You also remembered some special recipes from your . . . some favorite foods.

Favorite food. Grandmother would take tapioca and water and cinnamon and sugar and make a pudding, and it was absolutely delicious. And then [it was] perfectly gross after I grew up. I thought, oh! But as a child, it was beautiful and absolutely delicious. And I keep thinking I should make it. She

made bread and taught me how to make bread. I made a fantastic bread.

Did your mother stay at home, too? Did you learn similar kinds of things from both Grandma and Mom?

No. I don't recall learning anything from either of my parents.

So you must have spent quite a bit of time with Grandma.

With grandparents, both grandparents. With both sets of grandparents. Whether it's knitting, crocheting, tatting. Grandmother Mount taught me to tat. And the patience of these people. They were right-handed—they had this left-handed child. I don't think Mother could have done those things, but Grandmother Mount taught me to tat. Everything I learned (it's a strange thing, isn't it?) I learned from grandparents. And yet, I was a dearly loved child. I was a cared-for child. I was never neglected. I just had strong attachments to grandparents. Or I was the type of child that a grandparent could enjoy.

Did you have friends that you remember from Silver Peak?

No. I just remember the children in school. And I think that's why they put me there, because there were no people, or there was nobody for me to be with.

OK. You might have been the only child of your age at that time?

Right.

Which would have been right around 1940, correct?

Nineteen forty, right.

Right about when the war was starting and so on.

I can vaguely remember children. I can vaguely remember the playground. And I think when we were talking last time, you mentioned the playground. There was a playground there, and there was a merry-go-round. I'm sure there must have been swings. I don't know if there was a slide, but there was a merry-go-round. And between the two buildings was this outhouse [laughter] . . .

There must have been a civic activity or a PTA or its equivalent. And they would do school things. And we'd have the lawn, plays, all sort of activities.

Was it kind of a community room?

No, I think it was [a] schoolroom. I think the big kids must have gone there if they didn't ship them out to Tonopah or Bishop for high school. Maybe these were the seventh and eighth graders. I don't know. I think that's where they were. But like the Christmas party would be over there. And they had the one event where the blackbirds were baked in a pie.

Was it like the Mother Goose rhymes?

Old King Cole was a merry old soul, and we acted those out. And there were several. But the one I was in, I was one of the blackbirds in the pie, and we all got down on the floor, and they cut the pie, and all the blackbirds flew out. I jumped out and got to be the blackbird. And that was very exciting, because I think that was probably one of the few times I had real group activities. And as a youngster not having other children, you know, being there and walking back and forth to school by myself, I probably did that. All I had was family. I hadn't thought about it that way.

Do you remember any other community gatherings other than the school and the plays?

I remember the parades, but I don't remember where they went, and I don't remember what they were for.

Do you remember which holiday they were?

I know it was for Labor Day. I remember them as Fourth of July, but I know from pictures that they were Labor Day. And I just remember flags, music, people, excitement.

Would you have been around when they had any of the fights that they had during some of those great celebrations, events?

No, and I would have been protected. I would have been very well protected.

Do you feel like your parents were protective or strict with you, or did you have any way of comparing that?

I didn't have any way of comparing, and nobody had ever been strict with me in the same sense that other people were strict. I was never hit. I was never told "no." I was never reprimanded, abusively anyway. I was told, "That wasn't proper. You mustn't do that. Ladies don't do this. Why don't you think before you make that choice. It's just because somebody else is doing it. You figure out whether you should do it." So I was disciplined in an entirely different way. My dad never tolerated anyone being hit.

Fairly advanced for that time, because those are the kind of things that you hear in parenting classes today. But those, he learned those from his mother? Do you think that's how he was raised?

I don't know. My mother was the same way. Very gentle. If they raised their voice, you stopped, because you knew there was something, like a car was coming.

Because they never did normally?

They just did not do it. I don't remember any of my grandparents . . . and maybe when you've got these grandparents loving you so much that you respond so well to them that you're the child that doesn't have to be yelled at. I was overly protected. Well, I was not protected from ordinary things. This has tickled me with Nancy. Nancy said when the boys, her brothers, snuck beer, it was kind of "Well, that's what kids do." My paternal grandmother, Grandmother Mount, said, "Ladies do not go in bars. Ladies do not drink. Ladies do not smoke. Ladies do not use curse words. Ladies get up every morning and comb their hair, brush their teeth, and present a very good picture to the world." And that was it.

Now, Nancy will tell a different . . . I don't know if she'll tell things about Gram and Grandpa, their reaction. But the way Nance and her two brothers grew up was entirely different from me. And I never did go in a bar.

Because you talk about being very clear about what was acceptable and what was not, and Nancy talks about the total freedom of being in Silver Peak. So it was two completely different experiences in the same town and about the same age—not much difference in age.

Two different children and two different parents, and the grandparents were the only tie.

And the town. Do you remember going swimming?

Yes.

Where did you go?

I went in a mudhole of some sort, a pond.

Right there in town or outside of town?

Now, I remember it in town, but I don't remember ever going very far from town. And I don't think it was in town, but I remember it right there. And I didn't go swimming as such [but] that I jumped in and was splashing around with some water. And you didn't go swimming wherever Nancy learned to swim because . . .

She talked about the bottomless pit out in the playa, out away from town. Most of the people that I talk to who were kids in Silver Peak did go. There was a little swimming hole there not too far, probably, from where the dairy was. And they all went swimming there. I don't know how many years it was there.

Wherever Nance went, it was my understanding, it was a bottomless pit, and she had better swim, or she would sink to the bottom. And Grandmother tied a towel or something around her to make her learn how to swim. And that was not where I went. I had something different. Isn't that strange?

Yes. Completely different. Do you have other memories of Silver Peak, because you moved away. Do you know why your family moved away from there?

It had to have been financial, because Grandfather had gone on to Gabbs.

To Gabbs, about the same time that you moved away from Silver Peak?

Yes. And the war must have come on about right then. We went back to California. My dad wanted to go join like

everybody. And he had a club foot that wasn't a complete club foot. He had a problem.

Enough that he couldn't be accepted?

And then there was something else wrong with him, so he went to work at the shipyards. And that was the only time he ever had a job, was during the war effort.

Did you ever go back to Silver Peak?

Not to live, because we moved to Vegas, and then Grandma and Grandpa moved from Gabbs to Hawthorne.

I see. OK. So did you ever as an adult go back to Silver Peak?

When my dad died, he was cremated, and we went back there. So I thought I would spread his ashes, and I couldn't do it—just couldn't. So his ashes went to Ely where he was born.

What was it about Silver Peak that you couldn't do it?

Oh, I was so disappointed!

Really? Oh, why?

It was so barren. It was so ugly. It was so . . .

Not at all as you remembered it?

It was nothing. No. No.

Because you don't remember it that way?

No. I remember a very, very, very . . . pretty isn't the word, because the desert, you know . . . But I remember home . . . whatever my sense of home and good and

fun . . . and even with my being scared of all those boys.

It was a good part of life when you think back?

It was fun. Neat.

But to go back, had it changed from what you remembered?

Yes. Yes.

Could you find anything? You couldn't find the family home or the dairy or any of that?

Well, no, because it was all moved. See, where there was lumber, you took that lumber. And the house, you picked it up and moved it.

So your grandparents took their house with them. Had your parents also? No, because they went to California.

They went to California, but that house had to have gone They would not have left that. I can't imagine they'd leave it, because it would have probably been Grandfather's house and property.

I see. Part of the dairy and his land.

And the house went to Gabbs and is now in Hawthorne. The last time I was in Hawthorne (it's been about five years ago), the house is still in Hawthorne. And it turned from a mining shack. And now, I don't know if that house actually came from Goldfield. It probably did, came up from Goldfield to Silver Peak and then went to Gabbs and then went to Hawthorne. And it went from this very ugly house to a very charming, very small, white house with lovely flowers that always grow up front and lilacs.

And Grandmother was very meticulous. Her place was very clean. Physically we were all clean. And I don't remember ever bathing, but I know Grandmother didn't allow dirt.

And so, even though you didn't go back to Silver Peak after you moved back to California and then went to Las Vegas, you still visited your grandparents at Gabbs and at Hawthorne? Wherever they were, you would still visit there?

Yes.

OK. All right. I noticed that you call it "the Peak," and several people have said that. How did people arrive at "the Peak?"

It's always been the Peak. And people will say "on to old Silver Peak". When I grew up, it was always called the Peak. And I did go back up there, because I'd cross the dry lakes. But not going to the town. I went through the area—never thought much about it. Just, it was there. Until Dad died, and then thinking, well, that would be a good place.

It was not home?

No, because, as you came into the valley here, these big mining operations at the dry lake. That was not there. It was a very peaceful type of valley, with the cactus and the horses and not the clamor of trucks and . . . but there weren't those big trucks then. I mean, there were trucks, but in that time span they didn't build those great big huge trucks. And so there was nothing . . . and it was just insane. I was in my forties when Dad died. And it was just more than I could handle when I went up there and looked at that. And I thought, "Wow!" And so we didn't stay too long looking, because I had to get out. I wasn't happy.

*This was no longer the home you had
known as a kid?*

No. And I think now, some weekend
we'll drive down there. "Oh, gee. I'll go look
and see whether I remember." I can't.

KEITH MOUNT

***K** EITH MOUNT, born in 1926 in Los Angeles, is the grandson of Lloyd and Martha Lawson Mount who operated a dairy in Silver Peak, Nevada, around 1930. As a child Keith lived in Silver Peak with his family—his father Keith, mother Mabel, brother Bob and sister Nancy. His father mined. Later on after his family moved away from Silver Peak, Keith continued visiting his grandparents as a teenager during summers. After the morning and evening dairy chores were finished, Keith and his brother were free to catch burros or wild mustangs, roam the countryside hunting and fishing. At the time of his oral history interview, Keith was retired, living in Bridgeport, California, and working part-time as a fishing guide.*

Janelle Mount was present at part of the interview and spoke once during the course of the oral history.



VICTORIA FORD: Today is August 26, 1996, and I am here in Bridgeport, California, with Keith Mount. We are going to talk about his memories of Silver Peak,



Nevada. Keith, let's start with the date you were born and where you were born.

KEITH MOUNT: Born June 13, 1926, in Los Angeles, California, White Memorial Hospital.

Did you spend your early years in the L.A. area?

Early years were in [the] Los Angeles area, back and forth from Nevada to California, but all my advanced school years were in California. I went to grammar school in Silver Peak and then went into the service. After the service I got out, and I spent a year at the University of California at Santa Barbara. At that time it was a state teachers' college. It was not the University of California. Went into the building trades, basically, tile and bricklaying and marble, and was in that for forty years until I retired.

And is that when you moved here to Bridgeport?

We moved to Bridgeport probably three or four years after I retired, yes.

And now you still do some work, is that right?

I have a hobby that I make a little bit of money [with]. I am a fishing guide, yes. Basically, all it is, it's just a supplement to social security.

OK. Let's go back to Silver Peak. So you spent grammar-school years in Silver Peak. When did you first move there? What are your first memories?

The first memories are very vague, because I know we lived there, and I remember the school, and the school that I remember was a one-room school. It had ten or eleven rows of desks, and each row was designated as a different grade.

That's your main memory of the school. So you would have been school-age when you moved to Silver Peak, do you think?

Well, yes. We were eight, nine, or ten—something like that, so that was very young school age.

And what took your family to Silver Peak? Why did they move there?

Mining.

Your dad was in mining?

My dad went there for the mining part of it. And that was not long after the Depression, so that was, I guess, a good way to go to make a living, yes.

And do you remember what he did in mining?

No. I have no idea. I can't remember that at all.

Don't remember that he worked for a certain mill or a certain mine or who he worked for?

No, no. Those memories all came a little bit later when they worked there and when we lived there in the summers when I was a little older, yes.

You've drawn a map, which we're going to take a copy of, and you lived in a house towards the south end of Silver Peak, kind of southwest. And can you describe that house?

As I remember it, it was a small . . . really just a mining-town house, a wood shack. There was a kitchen, as I remember it, and maybe two bedrooms. The only thing that I really remember about it was the kitchen where my mother had kept all the cups and saucers and things on an open shelf. I remember one time she reached up to get some change to send one of us to the store and thought a second about it, picked the cup up, and brought it down and sat it on the counter to get the change out, and there was a great big scorpion in the cup: so if she

had stuck her hand in there, she would have got stung by the scorpion.

The only other thing that I remember about that area is that for a birthday, or probably it was for Christmas, my brother and I got a BB gun. We used to hunt right on the hill behind the house. And the first day we had the guns, my brother shot me in the back with the BB gun. As we were coming down a trail, he accidentally shot me in the back. But other than that, that's really all I remember about that particular time.

How badly were you hurt when he shot you with that BB gun?

Bad enough to chase him all the way home and hope I could catch him and beat the tar out of him.

[laughter] Didn't slow you down much?

No, it didn't. It didn't break the skin or anything. It, you know, hit me in the shirt or something. But it was a ways back: he probably was ten or fifteen yards behind me when it happened.

OK. Let's stop for just a minute and talk about your family. Tell me your parents' names.

Mother's name is Mabel Mount. Father's name is Keith. I'm a Junior.

And your brother was . . . ?

Bob . . . Robert. He was approximately a year and nine months younger than I. And a younger sister, which is Nancy.

Right, and she is about how much younger?

Oh, seven, eight years, maybe ten. It's something like that.

So at this time when you were living in this house, she was not around?

I don't remember. Either she was a very small baby, or she wasn't there yet.

At the very least, she was not out running around with you and your brother.

No, no.

And your grandparents, did they already live in Silver Peak when you moved there? Do you know?

Yes. Yes. They were living there. And as I remember it, my grandfather, Lloyd, he kept the pump down at the pond that pumped the water to the Mary Mine. And that was his job for the mine. We also had a dairy later, but that was his job there, and I think that was his job when we moved there.

Was to keep that water running up to the Mary Mine?

Yes. They pumped it up. Later years, when we were going there in the summers, we had horses, and we used to ride the pipeline (I don't remember whether it was once a month or once a week) and checked for leaks or anything like that from the pump up to the mine.

OK. And did you do that with your grandfather?

No, no. Brother and I would do that.

And if you found a leak, what would you do?

Never did find one, so I don't know.
[laughter]

Go back and tell grandpa? [laughter]

Yes, tell somebody, and I guess they would take care of it.

*What did it involve to run that pump?
What did he have to do?*

Very little. I don't know how they determined how much water to pump up there, or whether they pumped it up there continually. And they may have pumped it continually, because I don't remember him doing much of anything except making sure that the pump was in running order and things like that. And he was not a mechanic, but to make sure that the pump ran all the time, I guess, that was his job.

Do you know whether it was an electric pump?

Yes. It was, because I remember the electric lines coming over and going into the pump shed, so I assume it was electric.

OK. And then later he added a dairy to his work there?

Yes. In later years, they decided to, I guess, have a dairy, because it was needed in Silver Peak. They had five or six cows that we had to milk every day. The dairy consisted of the corrals where the cows were kept and then a milk shed where the milk was taken and processed after the cows are milked. And the way that it was processed, basically, it was dumped from the buckets that you milked in to a Coca-Cola cooler, a chest-type cooler. That kept the milk circulating and cold. And we would bottle it, but first you skimmed off a lot of the cream so that you could sell cream. But the milk was raw milk, and when it was in the bottles, why, it had cream three or four inches high on top of the bottles. So the butter and cheese and other dairy products were bought, and I don't know from where. But we had to go out to Coaldale . . . not to

Coaldale Junction, but to where the [Silver Peak] highway met the [Coaldale to Tonopah] highway. And I think there was a railroad stop out there, and [we would] pick up the stuff there. They would drop it off—I think it was probably once a week—and leave it in big bags that were insulated with ice in them, and we'd go out there and pick that up and bring it back, and that's what they dispersed during the week.

I'm curious about the Coke cooler that the milk was in. Was that one of those chest-type Coke coolers?

It was a chest type. It was approximately three feet by two feet and probably eighteen, twenty inches deep. That's a guess. And we just poured the milk in there. The theory of the cooler was that it circulated cold water and kept the Cokes cool. Now what they did is just put the milk in there, and it circulated the milk and kept the milk cool. So it was not anything that was a big sanitary thing. It was just that it kept running milk through the thing, and [we] washed it out when it was empty. But that's all I remember about that. It had folding doors on the top that you laid down, and that's the way they kept the milk.

Five or six cows and a small Coke cooler. It occurs to me that the population of Silver Peak was not very big at that point. If that was the main dairy, that's not a lot of milk.

That was the *only* dairy. I know they didn't have any left over, but I don't know whether they could have sold more milk than they had. I can't remember how many bottles we used to put up, but I remember delivering it. It was delivered around town.

So did you help with that? You went house to house doing that?

In the summertimes, we went with them, yes. At that time we weren't old enough to get a driver's license, but we did drive. It was the same as in any old mining town where, as soon as you learned to drive, why, you drove—whether it was ten years old or what. I remember when I came back to California to get a driver's license at seventeen (I think it was sixteen or seventeen years old), at that time I had been driving for three or four years, so it wasn't any problem to get a driver's license.

What did you drive, do you remember?

We had a pickup truck, and it was a Ford. And I'm trying to think, a 1932 or 1933 Ford pickup, something like that my grandfather owned. And that's what they did the delivery in, and that's what we went out to pick up the supplemental parts for the dairy that we sold. They didn't have a car at that time, and I think the pickup . . . yes, I'm pretty sure that was the only kind of vehicle they had.

Did you ever drive out to the junction and pick up the butter and cheese and sell them by yourself?

We'd go, my brother and I . . . no, not by ourselves. We drove there all the time, but my grandfather rode with us. It's a long ways. And at that time, still in that period (I mean, we were up there in the summers), I remember taking my grandmother to Tonopah, and she didn't drive. So we took her over to Tonopah a couple of times, I did.

Do you remember what you went to Tonopah for?

No. It had to be, not business, but just shopping of some kind. But that was a rare occasion to go that far. We used to go to Bishop in the pickup to get hay for the cows. We drove over there, I don't know, once a month, something like that, to pick up hay.

You can't pick up very much in a small pickup. So . . .

But there wasn't any source of hay right near Silver Peak?

No.

Because it doesn't grow over there?

No. I don't think there was anything in Fish Lake Valley either at that time that was available. Yes, it was Bishop. I know we went to Bishop to get the hay.

When you were in school, when you were living there with your parents, do you remember how many other kids were in your grade in school? Or were you the only one in your grade?

It could have been very possible I was the only one in that grade. I don't remember that, but I think there was probably only about seven, eight kids in the whole school. And they were in various grades . . .

So it could have been one kid per grade, actually?

Very easily, yes, without some of the rows or desks being filled. I think there might have been ten rows, but each row was designated as a different grade. And there may have not been anybody in some of them and two or three people in another one, because I can't remember any of the children that were there, I really can't.

Anything else about the school that you remember? Anything about what you studied or things that you liked or disliked about it?

No. No, not really. The only thing that I really remember about it was that it had a two-hole outhouse. And I can't even

remember whether it was just separated and one side was girls and one side was boys, but there was a designation there somewhere. And now I can't remember any more than that about it.

Did your home also have an outhouse, or did it have an indoor bathroom?

Oh, yes. No, no. It was all outhouses. Well, Grandpa and Grandma had indoor plumbing, I think, but there wasn't too much of it up there.

Did you have running water at your home or a pump outside?

I think we pumped outside, because we lived in this house over here on the hill, yes. Yes, I remember that. We had to go out and pump water. But I think Grandma and Grandpa had water. Grandad did a lot to that house down there. He was pretty good that way. He would do a lot of work on it, things like that. Yes, I'm sure they had an inside toilet and bathroom, but it was probably something that was added on to the house that they originally started with, so I can't tell you that for sure.

OK. I want to talk about this map a little bit, because on this map, between where you lived and where your grandfather lived, there's two main roads—one which has the school on it and the other which kind of goes around by where there was a hotel, grocery store, movie house, and so on. Can you talk about what you remember of those?

I don't remember how much it cost to go to the movie, but I know we didn't go very often. A nickel comes to mind, but I'm not sure about that. The bottle house is what fascinated me. And always, ever since that time, I've always wanted to build one. But it was dilapidated somewhat. Nobody lived in

it. It was just kind of, actually, a side house of some kind. It was out in the back a little bit.

Like maybe used for storage, or was it totally empty?

No, it wasn't used for anything when I remember it. It was just there. There was no roof on it. The bottles were all placed so that the necks were inside and the back ends were outside, as I remember it, all placed in cement or something like that. And the walls were as thick as the bottles, so it was twelve, fourteen inches thick. But on the outside, I remember, you could see the bottles. I can't remember about the inside, whether you could see them or not.

But even as a youngster you were interested in the construction of that house.

Yes. That fascinated me. I really, really thought that was something. And they got all the bottles locally from the bars, of course. I didn't see it built. It was there and had been there for some time, I guess. But that was the story—that all of the bottles came from town, so there was a lot of them.

OK. And next to those two buildings was a combination of a hotel and a grocery store?

And the way I remember that was, when we first went there, before we moved into this house up here, we stayed in the hotel for a few days. And I'm quite sure we stayed upstairs. I remember to wash and clean up you poured the water out of a pitcher into a bowl and washed right there in the bedroom where you stayed. And they had a dresser-type thing there with a bowl with a pitcher of water. They poured water in there, washed, and threw the water out. And I can't remember about the toilet facilities, what they were.

Do you remember where you ate while you stayed at the hotel? Any memory of that at all?

No.

You talked also about the power station, and you remember who ran that?

The lady that ran that was (I remember, to me as a kid) an old witch. Any time the kids came around, she was out there with a broom, chasing them off or that type of thing. In the field next to the powerhouse, which was on this side over here, there was a fenced field. She had a jenny [female donkey] in that field, and it was just as mean as she was, because you couldn't go through the field without getting chased off. As I remember it, it was a pinto jenny. That jenny could be clear across the field and, if you tried to sneak through the fence to go back through the field and go back out into the outlying area there, which was a shortcut, that jenny would chase you right out of the field. You didn't want to get caught in there. I never did.

So between the two of them, you had to walk around the power station to get down into the . . .

We had to go . . . there was a road in front of the power station or on the side of the power station. It went around out here. And then down, a little bit south, there was another road that went out back of town, as I remember it. But out in here, out in the area behind the power station, that really was, as I remember it, kind of that salt-grass flats out there. And there was a lot of wild burros that ran out there, and we used to go out and catch the burros and ride them. And to get out there, why we had to go around the power station. We didn't go through it or run through the field or anything.

To catch the burros, how difficult was that for a couple of kids?

Well, it wasn't too difficult. The burros were very smart, and if you carried a rope, why, you never got close to them. But if you carried a little stick of hay, you could get right up to them. And the only way that we could ride them was, we'd take some hay and get close enough to where we could get a hold of the mane and jump on. And to steer the burro, we'd take a piece of bailing wire about a foot long and wrap it up so that it was kind of a switch. And to make them go one way, you'd hit them on the side of the head with the bailing wire. Whichever way you wanted to go—if you wanted to go to the left, you'd hit them on the right side, and they'd turn to the left. And we'd ride them until they bucked us off, and then we'd go get another one and do the same thing.

So you didn't actually tame them or break them or take them home?

No. No.

This was just entertainment, to go out and ride them?

It was supposed to be that they belonged to this Nellie Coughlin. And when she ever caught us out there, why, we'd be in trouble. So we didn't do anything but just ride them occasionally. In later years we got our own horses, so we didn't have to do that.

And Nellie Coughlin is the woman who ran the power station?

Yes.

Do you know what she did at the power station? What it involved to run it?

I have no idea. It was a very big power station. I don't know whether it is still there or not.

The building is no longer there, but the power station is there.

Yes. It was a red building. I think it was two stories high, but it was a pretty good-sized building. And I don't know what she did. She lived there. Whether there was living quarters in there or what, I don't know. We never were very friendly with her, so we never did find out any of that.

And you remember Ernest Shirley's, kind of kitty-corner across the street from that?

Very, very vaguely. Yes. I remember that they lived in that area, and . . . Now, when you mention the name, Shirley, that brought it back, yes.

Yes. OK. And then you said that there were some corrals, also, the other direction, kitty-corner from her.

Yes. They were probably . . . now, this might not be to scale, but they might have been down this road just a little bit farther. But I know that Perry White owned those corrals. He owned a bar downtown, too, and I can't remember which side of the street it was. But he also was the person that supposedly owned the corrals out where we trapped the wild horses, and that was fifteen miles out of town. But he had horses there—kept a couple of horses in that corral. And when my brother and I had our horses, a number of times he would give us a nickel to go round up his horses. They would be out here in the fields where the burros were, out in the salt marshes eating, and we'd have to go out and round the horses up and run them back to his corral. And he gave us a nickel a piece to do that.

But I remember one instance where we were bringing the horses back. You had to come down the road, basically, that went alongside the power station. And there were two or three houses in here, and I was chasing a couple of horses down the road. And my brother got off into that area, chasing a horse, and went down alongside those houses. And as he rode down there, one of the horses went through somebody's backyard, and he went in through the backyard to chase the horse, and a clothesline caught him about chest-high and knocked him off the horse. The clothesline was attached to the house and the outhouse, and it turned over the outhouse, and a lady was in the outhouse. And she came out pulling up her drawers and cussing like an old trooper. [laughter] We just kept going. And my dad heard about that.

I bet you couldn't get away with much of anything in this little town without your parents hearing.

That's true.

That's quite an adventure. Tell me, when you had your horses, was it when you lived in this house or when you were visiting your grandparents?

No, when we visited my grandparents. That was the inducement to come up in the summers and help in the dairy and help around. They needed the help. And I don't know what they did when we weren't there in the summers. I don't think they hired anybody, but I guess Grandad and Grandma did it themselves.

So you lived in Silver Peak with your parents and your brother for two or three years, approximately.

Yes.

And then what happened to your family?

We moved to South Gate, California, I believe it was. Belle or South Gate, right in that area somewhere. And I went to school down there—grade school, junior high school, high school, and college.

OK. And that's when you started coming back to visit your grandparents?

Yes. Shortly after we left. I don't know whether it was the next year that we came back in the summertimes, after we left there, or maybe there was a year lapse in there, but in that time period. Because I remember being probably fourteen years old about that time then, plus or minus, someplace in there.

So that would have been somewhere in 1937, 1938, 1939, that you were spending summers there. And the inducement was that you would get a saddle horse to ride if you came to help.

Grandad made a deal with Perry White. He used the corral to trap the horses, and they were all wild horses. We went up there and trapped the horses and brought them back to town. Grandad had the dairy, so we put them in the corral with the cows over there, and he broke the horses for us the first time. My grandfather did that. He was an old cowboy: he knew what to do. So we rode horses all summer and worked in the dairy. And then at the end of the summers, we'd turn the horses loose. They'd go back up where they were. And when we came back the next year, we'd go back up there and trap them again and then bring them back to town. The same horses.

Did they recognize you after being wild again?

No, I don't think so. But they were broke, so we didn't have to do too much. In the wintertime when they stayed up there, they reverted to wild, of course. And then, when we caught them again the next spring or the next summer, why, we had to basically top them off and that was about it. And then we rode them all summer.

"Top them off." What does that mean?

Well, they're a little green when you get them back, and they want to buck. So you have to kind of start from scratch again, but it isn't like starting all over again. We never rode them to the bucking part of it, because we were just kids. But put a saddle on them, if you tried to get on them, why, they'd want to buck. So we'd tie a sack of wheat on them and let them run around the corral for a day with a sack of wheat in the saddle. And then we took the saddles off, and we rode them bareback all the time.

Just so they got used to the weight on their back again. You rode them bareback all the time?

Almost all the time, yes. We only had one saddle between us. My brother owned a saddle, and where he came by it, I have no idea. Can't remember where he got it from. Probably somebody gave it to him. But to get the horses in the summertime when we first went up, we had to go back out to the corrals and trap them, and that was about fifteen, twenty miles out of town. My dad would take us up there. We had to stay at the corrals. They had a shack up there at the corrals, and the shack had a lot of snakes in it, so we didn't stay in the shed. We'd go down to the corral and sleep in kind of a hay-keeping place that they had there. And the corral was rigged so that the spring had a trough right in the middle of the corral, and that's where the horses watered all of the time, and that's why they came there. When

they'd come in at night, why, you had a wire you could pull that would close the gate. Then you'd wake in the morning, find out if your horses were there. And if they weren't, why, you'd turn the horses loose and wait until the next night. And they all had to come at some time or another, because it was the only spring. So sometime in the middle of the night, you'd catch two or three bunches of them, and you'd run them into a side corral and wait until in the morning, and then get up and find out if your horses were there.

But we got brave a couple of times, at least one time that I remember, and decided to ride a couple of the horses that weren't ours. And it turned out to be a fiasco in one way, but it was very fortunate in another. They had a chute, and you could get the horses in the chute. I wanted to use my brother's saddle to ride the horse, and he said, "No, because if the horse gets bucking and breaks down the fence or breaks down a gate, why it's gone with the saddle."

So I decided to ride it bareback. And I got on the horse, and he came out of the chute bucking. Now mind you, we were probably somewhere between ten and fourteen years old, and they'd take us up there to the corrals, and then Dad would go back to town. They would come about four days later and pick us up. They left us with enough food and stuff for the three or four days that we were up there. But when the horse came out of the chute and bucking, it bucked me off, of course, almost immediately. And, fortunately, instead of landing crossways on the trough, where the spring fed the trough, I landed longways in the trough. If I had landed across it, then I probably would have broke something, and we would have been up there for another two or three days without anybody to help.

But that was just kind of the way things went in those days, you know. I never thought about it, and nobody else thought about it. When we told my dad about it, why,

he was kind of mad, because he could see what the consequences would have been. But that was just the way it was. That was it.

Do you remember any kids or any adults having accidents when you lived around there?

No, I really don't.

Because there was always the potential for that, with mining and riding wild horses and all that.

Oh, yes. But I marvel at the way it is today. If somebody get's a cut finger or a broken bone of some kind, a minor thing, you've got to rush to the hospital. But I know we didn't do that. We had lots of cuts and bruises. I went and got my tonsils out—it was the first time I ever saw a hospital.

You don't remember a doctor in Silver Peak?

No, I really don't.

Or going to a doctor anywhere?

No, never went to a doctor in Silver Peak.

When you said that you helped your grandparents with the dairy, what was your job? What were your chores?

Really not a lot of anything. I mean, we had chores to do—feed the cows, milk the cows. When we weren't doing that, why we were kind of on our own. It didn't take very much. You got six cows, did that morning and night, and if I were to guess, it probably wouldn't take over an hour or two hours in the morning or the same at night to do it. And the rest of the time was our time.

We rode horses. We went to the swimming pool. You'd ride the horses down

to the swimming pool way at the south end of town.

Past where you originally lived?

Yes. Yes. And what else did we do? We rode the horses mostly, and we hunted. The marsh was full of game out there . . . birds. And as I remember it, my grandad was designated the game warden there, and that's why I can remember not having to worry about things. [The job of] game warden wasn't like it is today. You didn't sit there with a book and all. It was just to make sure that somebody didn't come in and kill a hundred ducks or something like that. Almost everybody hunted whenever they wanted to. When we went deer hunting, the first thing you did when you got to camp was kill a fawn. That was camp meat. And in those years we actually came across the state line, although we didn't know exactly where it was, and we hunted and fished over in this area. That's why, with the guiding that I am doing today, people ask me how long I've been doing it, and I say, "Well, fifty or sixty years I've been hunting and fishing in this area." So I hunted here and fished in here when I was ten years old. And I am now seventy, so that's a long time.

How far is Silver Peak from Bridgeport? When you say you were over in this area hunting and fishing, it's a ways.

Yes. It is quite a ways, but we wandered all the way from Battle Mountain to over here. Grandad was a great fisherman. He loved to fish, and so every time he'd get a chance to get away, why, we would hop in his pickup truck and throw the camp box in there and go fishing, hunting. I hunted mostly with my dad in later years. Those were after the Silver Peak years. But during that time, why, yes, we fished and fished.

In fact, Silver Peak years, I remember fishing in Fish Lake Valley with Bob

Chiatovich. And Bob was . . . I don't know, I'm going to guess five or six or seven years my senior. And they had a ranch in Fish Lake Valley, as I remember it, and we fished over there. In later years, why, I duck hunted with Bob over there. And that's all I can really remember about that part of it.

Did you remain friends with Bob Chiatovich?

No. I knew him, and, like I say, he was older than I was, so when he took us hunting with him . . . I'm going to guess he's seventeen, eighteen years old, and we were five or six years younger. So it was just kind of a nice guy taking a kid hunting or fishing with him. And Bob was kind of a wild young man anyway, I understand. I don't remember too much about him. I saw him a couple times in later years, and he remembered me, but that was basically all it was.

Any other people from Silver Peak that you remember as a kid?

Not really.

Did you make any friends there, have other kids that you played with, or was it mostly you and your brother?

I'm sure there were other kids. We didn't do a lot of playing with them. When we worked at the dairy, it was just there for the summers. And I don't know whether the rest of the kids felt that we were Californians just coming there for the summer or what, but we didn't have too many young friends. We were just Brother and I, and we did most of the things ourselves. When we lived there and I was in grade school, I don't remember any other kids. I think the Shirley's had some children, but I don't remember being friendly with any of them . . . I mean, knowing any of them very well.

OK. Your family moved away from there, and then your grandfather moved where?

He went to Gabbs.

To Gabbs, and that would have been during the war years, right?

Yes. Yes.

When World War II came, that changed Silver Peak dramatically again.

I didn't know any more [about it]. In fact, from the time we left there until this day, I've never been back to Silver Peak. I've always wanted to, but I've never been back. We've been back over to Hawthorne. We were there for a while.

Because your grandfather eventually moved there, did he?

He went to Gabbs, and from Gabbs they went to Hawthorne, yes. And I worked in the summers for a company that was building a road up there—built a road from Gabbs out to the highway around Coaldale Junction or Mina or someplace in there. And I worked on that road. I remember being about sixteen years old at that time, and I drove a dump truck for that company for part of the summer.

That's kind of the main, paved road now into Gabbs from Mina?

Yes. The name of the company was either Silver State . . . or had something to do with glass. Maybe it was Silver State Construction. I can't remember, but they built a road in there, and I drove truck for them and started out working someplace in that company. They needed truck drivers, because that was during the war and most of the guys were gone. And being fifteen or sixteen years old, and having driven already

for three or four years, so the only thing You had to drive from one end . . . or from the gravel pit over to where they were paving the road in these dump trucks. I would drive them on down there, and I don't remember how fast I was going—probably fifty-five or something like that—and a pickup truck pulled up alongside of me, and he said, "Kick that thing in the ass. It's not made out of glass." [laughter] So we had to drive really fast. I worked on a diamond drill up at the mine for a little bit the starting of that summer.

That was in Gabbs?

That was in Gabbs, yes.

Was that your only experience with mining?

No. Dad and Grandad owned a mine out of Las Vegas, and we lived there for two or three years as I remember. And now I don't know where that was in this time frame, but Nancy was there at that time. And they had a gold mine, and we used to go from that mine in to school. We went to the Midway. It was Midway at the time which is now

JANELLE MOUNT: Henderson.

Henderson, yes. There was just a little gas station there, and it was called Midway. And we would go in to the Midway, and then there was a teenager that had a car and picked us up and drove us in to Vegas to go to school and then would bring us back. And somebody would come and pick us up from the mine. But that was then.

So you did some work there then, too?

I was very young.

You were too young.

I don't remember doing any work. I remember the mine very well and being in the mine a lot of times. Yes, I don't remember too much. The houses they built there were built out of the plywood that was left off of building Boulder Dam, or [it was] Hoover Dam at the time.

When you were in Silver Peak and riding your horses, did you ride around the mining areas?

No. No, the only time that we ever got close to the mines, as far as the horseback, was just riding the pipeline. And I don't remember riding it in the mining area, but I remember being in there a number of times. We used to go up there with Grandad to the mine. And I remember the Mary Mine as a mine and the mill, and the mill was probably the most prevalent thing that I remember up there of the mining. I do remember, I think, the mill was shut down. And [I don't know] what period that was, but we were living there.

This was when you were living with your parents?

No. No. This is in the summertime. I was older. I went over with my Grandad, and Grandad took us up there.

So would that have been the Blair Mill or the Cord Mill that you remember or . . . ?

I have no idea which mill it was. I remember going up the canyon, and it probably was the first main building that you came to, as I remember. But then that mill was closed down. I remember Grandad went on up there, and they were doing silver mining, too. Maybe it was mostly silver, I don't remember. But in the middle, where the final ore came down and the silver was coming out, it went through some plates or a big table . . . a shaker table of some kind,

and then the silver was in a final form. It had a leak in the table, and Grandad picked up a piece of solid silver that probably was five or six inches long and three inches wide, maybe three quarters of an inch thick, that had been leaking. The plates were leaking, and it had dropped out of there, probably drop by drop. I don't know. It had been there for a long, long time. Of course, at that time, silver was what, three dollars an ounce or something like that? So it really wasn't any great find other than just having the silver. And that's really all I remember about the mines and the mills. I think the Shirley's were doing some mining on the opposite . . . They weren't up on the mine. They were up at the south end of Silver Peak or something.

When you think back to the time at Silver Peak, are those happy years to you?

Yes. They were all happy years. Yes. I don't remember any of my younger years being unhappy years.

Why do you think that was? Did it have anything to do with Silver Peak, or did it have to do with your family in particular or . . . ?

No. I just don't remember having any problems. Although I knew there were problems, you know, financial problems with the family . . . Now I know that. I didn't know that [then].

From the Depression years?

From the Depression years. And we always had something to eat. And there wasn't any dissension, you know, in the family or anything.

You kids were pretty free to come and go.

Yes. You know, when you were younger, at that time you weren't as restricted, I think, as you are now. There wasn't as many things to get into trouble with. We lived in Silver Peak . . . when we were there in the summertime, there was a (boy, I'm trying to think of the name of the warm springs). The road went out across the dry lake somewhere to some warm springs, and if I remember (it wasn't Soda Springs I don't think), but they had a building, and the building housed the warm spring. It was like a big swimming pool, basically. And I remember going over there a couple of times. But . . .

And that's different than the hot springs right outside of town? This was further away.

Yes. It was further away, and it wasn't out the main road. We had to go across the dry lake and go out that way somewhere. And I can't remember how far it was. Maybe ten, fifteen miles or maybe more than that. But I remember my brother and I and another young man that lived in town going there a couple times. He'd kill me if I can't remember his name.

Fred and Dixie Lyle, but I think that was another place. I think that had to be Hawthorne.

Different person. But you went out past . . . you were kind of pointing past the dry lake to this other hot mineral spring.

Yes. And it wasn't within sight of town. It was farther away than that, so I can't remember.

But you were allowed to go that far away on your horses without . . .

No. No. We took the car. My brother and I would take the truck and go out there. It was too far to ride the horses. Yes. That was

a long ways away. I mean, it was driving distance. And we'd drive out there maybe on a Friday night or something like that and go to the hot springs. I think it cost some money to go in over there. It wasn't just a thing that was out there. Oh, I wish I could remember where that was. But I distinctly remembered going to it.

And driving as young teenagers without driving licenses?

Oh, yes. No driver's license.

But that was not unusual?

No, there wasn't anything unusual about it, no. Everybody that had a vehicle that could drive, drove. I can't remember whether Shirley was a sheriff or somebody like that. One of the families in town was a sheriff, and he never bothered anybody. We didn't do anything reckless. We were just basically doing it out of necessity, in most cases, to drive, yes.

One of the things that we hadn't mentioned was that swimming hole out in the dry lake. Did you go out there? Do you remember that?

We used to go out there two or three times a week. And that's where Nancy learned to swim. And the way she did that was, we tied a rope around her, and she would get in and start swimming, and we'd walk around and have the rope on her. She learned to dog paddle there, and after a while she could do it without the rope. And they had a diving board. It was just an old plank that you went off the end of. But it was a hole probably . . . maybe twenty-five or thirty feet across, and you could see down real deep, but you couldn't see the bottom of it. So it was just a spring that came out of the dry lake. And that's where Nancy learned

how to swim. We knew how to swim when we went there, so . . .

Are there any other memories of Silver Peak that we haven't covered? Anything that you think bears . . . ?

Oh, I can remember a few things. I remember hunting in the marshes across the road from where we lived. And the first time I went hunting over there, I borrowed a shotgun from the guy that lived up at the mill, kind of across the road from the house. And it was a ten-gauge, double-barrel shotgun. I was just a young boy, so he told me, he said, "Be very careful, it kicks real bad." And went out there and shot the first time, and it knocked me down. Absolutely, knocked me down. And so what I did then, I took a rope and tied it to a fence post. And the rope was loose enough so I could move it around and aim at the ducks. And the first time I shot that, I broke the fence post off, so I took the gun back to him. I couldn't use it. [laughter] Couldn't use it at all.

It was too strong.

Yes. And we hunted out there. There was a telephone pole across the street, basically, right very close to the ditch that came out of the pool and went down into the marshes. I remember the telephone pole, because that was where my brother and I practiced with our .22. We would stick a penny in a crack in a telephone pole and then walk back and shoot at the penny. And we had to learn to shoot like that, because Grandad would let us shoot the birds—doves mainly—but we couldn't shoot them in the body. We had to shoot their heads off, because if you shot them in the body with a .22, why, you didn't have anything left. So that's what we practiced on, was shooting that penny out of the telephone pole.

Target practice.

Yes, and we didn't get very much ammunition, because they couldn't afford a lot of it.

So you had to be a good shot. I mean, you had to learn how to do it right.

Well, you learned. It was a necessity, that's all. You just learned to do it and to do it right.

And it was a necessity because you ate the game, too?

Oh, yes. We ate it, but it wasn't a necessity that we shot them. That was a sport, and we used the game instead of wasting it.

The ducks, we did the same thing. We also didn't shoot ducks all the time. Down in the slough or in the marshes, we would take a fishing pole and a fishing line and a hook, and put three kernels of corn on a fishing hook, and throw it in there, and then walk back and hide. And the ducks would come in, and they would grab that. You would catch them on the fishing pole, and then you would reel in the line, and you would reel in the duck. And that's the way we caught ducks a lot of the time. We didn't have to shoot them all the time.

Interesting.

I can't remember a lot else about it. The riding the burros and the horses around. The parade that they had downtown. And I don't remember a lot about the parade except Nancy rode in the parade on the horse that I owned. It was the tamest of the two horses. And she rode that in the parade with a rope on it's lower jaw, a feather, and bareback, and dressed as the little Indian in Red Rider, whatever that was. And the horse didn't like all the noise and the band or the music that was going on. It seemed to me like that was on a Fourth of July. But it was

about the time that they had the fight, Mac Snelling or Baer, or something like that.

Baer and Murphy?

It might have been. Yes. I remember Baer, and I remember Snelling. It may have been the same time, it may have been different times. That's the thing that I can't remember.

But did you go to those fights, do you remember?

Yes, but I don't remember very much about it. I just don't remember very much about it. The only thing that I remember about Baer—very big, heavysset guy, he was fat. And before the fights and after the fights, he sat in the saloon and drank beer. And that was all I remembered.

That's how he got in shape? [laughter]

Yes. I guess. He was a good fighter. But comparing it to nowadays

Brought people into town and

Oh, yes. Yes. And to have that in Silver Peak was a big affair. A lot of people came from every place. Other than that, I don't remember a lot about it.

You just mentioned a couple of things. One about E.L. Cord—that your father at one point worked for him, but that was after you lived in Silver Peak.

That was after Silver Peak, and Dad worked at the ranch. As I remember it, it was over in the Owens Valley someplace. And that was when we were living in South Gate, and Dad would come home on the weekends. He drove up there, worked, and then came home on the weekends.

OK. And you also have a memory of, probably, Fred Vollmar and an airplane that you mentioned?

Fred Vollmar either owned or flew in an old Lockheed Lodestar twin-engine. And he would come into town. One of the people that he had as kind of a right-hand man, although he wasn't the man, was Bob Chiatovich. And there was another brother, as I remember, Jack Chiatovich. Jack was older than Bob. And those two were kind of gofers for Fred Vollmar. I can't remember whether Jack was, but I'm pretty sure Bob was. And they would land on the dry lake out there with that airplane, and the airplane came up close to the highway someplace. I can't even remember whether there was a hangar there or not, but that would be down in here, between where the junction of the two roads came together and out at the warm springs. But someplace in that area. They'd park it there, and then they'd use the dry lake for a landing strip, yes.

And you remember seeing the plane come in?

Oh, I remember seeing it come in a couple, three times. I remember the one time, in taking off, that it had rained, and there was water on the lake and probably about three or four inches of water. And the lake was hard, so they could get going, but they couldn't get going quite fast enough to take off. And they tried two or three times, taxi there to run down that lake. And I guess, finally, the only way they could get off was, they got it as fast as it would go, and they retracted the landing gears. And, fortunately, the landing gears came up instead of the airplane going down.

But it was close?

Yes. It was very close. Very close. And that was a good old airplane, and I've seen a number of them since then. In fact, I have a

pilot's license, and I've flown a lot since then. But yes, that's the only recollections I have of Fred Vollmar. That's about it, yes.

GERRY COOPER

GERALDINE (HILL) COOPER, nicknamed Gerry, was born in Goldfield and, like many children whose fathers worked in Silver Peak in the 1930s, spent her childhood living between the two towns. After high school Gerry had a tough time finding a job in Silver Peak, not because she was female, but because her father's income as superintendent of the Black Mammoth Mill made employers think she did not need a job. Gerry brought some "firsts" to Silver Peak—such as playing softball on the team that won the state championship and being the first bride to marry in Silver Peak.



VICTORIA FORD: Today is August 26, 1996, and I am here with Gerry Cooper in her home in Yerington, Nevada. We're going to be talking about Silver Peak today. Gerry, let's start with when and where you were born.

GERRY COOPER: I was born in Goldfield, Nevada, September 26, 1920. That was before the big fire which was 1923.



Do you remember it? You would have been three years old.

I do not remember it. I know it was in 1923, and it was in July. But I think that's why I'm so afraid . . . worried about fires. I can remember standing there watching something burn, and I thought it was something else. But my brother [Leon Hill] said it [must have been] at that time,



Gerry Cooper was on the softball team that won the state championship in 1938. Back row, l to r: Unidentified, Rosie Lano, unidentified, Coach Walt Lyle, Gerry Cooper, Olive ?, Kathy Spaethe. Front row, l to r: Unidentified, Wilma Hill, Joanne Hall, unidentified. (Photograph courtesy of Leon Hill.)

because he could remember where we stood, and I could remember the same spot.

Actually, when I was real small, my folks were in Silver Peak then left, and then we went back again in later years.

So what would be your first memories of Silver Peak?

Well, the one thing that stands out is, shortly after my father [Fayette Hill] took the job as the superintendent in the Black Mammoth Mill (I was in the third grade, so that would put me like about eight years old), he took us up there at Easter time, and we went through the mill. My mother bought pongee dresses for us, and we got them wet, and they shrunk up.

I can also remember when my dad used to clean the tables [in the mill] afterwards, with the mercury. I watched him do that many, many times. We always wanted to hold the bulb. They poured this mercury on there, and the gold that was on the tables would adhere to mercury. And then you pick that little ball up after they clean the tables real good, and it was really heavy.

The gold?

Yes, but then it went on through, and they shipped concentrates at that time. In later years they melted the gold down, but at that time they shipped the concentrates, which were hauled, I think, to Blair Junction to put them on the railroad.

But even as a child your father took you to show you his work?

Oh, yes. Oh, my dad was wonderful! When Weepah started, I can remember going to Weepah with my dad. I was probably just six, seven years old at that time. He took us everywhere. He was mostly in the milling. His brother Frank, who was Frances' [Frances Hill Chiatovich] father, was in the mining. He was a wonderful machinist. He could make just about anything. Right here in Yerington, when he first came here, the farmers said, "Fayette Hill could make anything." And one year in Gabbs, when we had the garage, we had a gear that was out of a 1927 Buick, and we could not buy one. So my husband put the pieces into a rag, and I came over here to Yerington to my father. He made me a gear, and it worked. In fact, the fellow that owned the Buick dealership thought it was factory made. I don't think we ever convinced him that my father had done it.

And your mother's name was?

Geraldine Houser Hill. She stayed at home and raised eight of us children. I have three brothers older than I. I am the oldest of five girls, so I was the fourth child.

And your grandparents, did they also live around the Silver Peak area?

I did not know my grandmother on my dad's side, Mummy Hill. She died when Leon was a baby, I believe, but my Grandfather Hill was in Silver Peak. Mom used to make pies and stuff, and I used to take them over. He lived in a little cabin down from the mill, and there's a tunnel that goes back into the hill, and my grandfather used to mine that. I used to take goodies over to him, and if he wasn't home, then I'd go up to the tunnel, and I'd call to him. He'd come out, and we would go back to where it

was nice and cool and sit there and visit. I really regret that I didn't remember a lot of the stories that my grandfather told. We called him Daddy Hill. His first name was Oscar.

Now there are double cousins in here, which is totally confusing, to me at any rate, but you have a nice way of explaining it. [laughter]

And it's probably confusing to a lot of people. My father and Frances's father were brothers [Fayette and Frank Hill]. My mother and Frances's mother were sisters [Geraldine and Lillian Houser], and brothers married sisters [Fayette married Geraldine, and Frank married Lillian]. So our blood line on both sides is the same as if it was my father and mother.

Your cousins are the closest things to sisters and brothers, you said?

That's right. She [Frances Hill] has always been more like a sister to me than a cousin, because, for one thing, she was five and a half years older than I. When I was a teenager growing up, she had just gotten married, and she just kind of tucked me under her wing and took care of me. Then in later years, when I lost my sight—I still play bridge with the big cards—she always made sure I had the best seat where the light was the best and took care of me. She was just like a big sister, and she always was. That's Frances Hill. She married Stan Chiatovich later.

And so you were born in Goldfield, but your family lived in Silver Peak. Tell me how that worked?

At the time when dad was there, there was no high school in Silver Peak. In later years, there was grammar school, but there was not a high school. So, we lived in Silver

Peak on all weekends and all holidays and vacations. We went to school in Goldfield five days a week, Monday through Friday. My father would come in on Friday night and pick us up. We'd go to Silver Peak and spend the weekend. *Early* Monday morning, and I mean *early* Monday morning—and that was before you had heaters in the car—we heated bricks in the oven of the wood stove, wrapped them, and we covered up with quilts, and then he'd drive us to Goldfield in time to go to school. In twelve years of traveling, Friday night out to Silver Peak, Monday back to school, I never missed a day, and I was never late in twelve years. The only time I missed was when a brother died and a sister died, and that's the only school in twelve years I ever missed.

What happened to your brother and sister who died?

My sister died with double pneumonia, and my brother died with a ruptured appendix.

And did they die because of lack of medical help?

Well, in those days they didn't have what they have now. They had good family doctors—doctors that came right to your house. In fact, when Mary died, I can remember the doctor coming and taking care of her. In those days they put those mustard plasters on you, and she tore that off. But she passed away when she was twelve. I was fourteen at the time. And then my brother, Fayette, he was pushing an ore car and felt something give, and he just thought it was just . . . but he had a ruptured appendix. And they rushed him to Tonopah to a Doctor Craig, who was a wonderful doctor. He delivered both my girls. Also at that time, Fred Vollmar had a doctor, a specialist, fly in from Los Angeles, and he checked my brother and said that Dr.

Craig had done a wonderful job taking care of Fayette. But peritonitis had set in.

So it wasn't that there wasn't medical help, it was more a matter of lack of antibiotics and those kinds of things?

That's right, because today they could have saved somebody with pneumonia. I've had pneumonia four times. And they could have saved somebody with a ruptured appendix much easier, because I had a son-in-law that had a ruptured appendix.

Those must have been very tragic losses for your family.

They were. They were *really* tragic losses, because those were our first losses—my sister at twelve and my brother when he was twenty-three.

And you were just fourteen?

I was fourteen when I lost my sister, and my brother when I was sixteen. And Fayette, oh, he was just a wonderful person.

And your sister was just two years younger than you?

She was just two years younger. She was just a beautiful girl. She was so pretty and had such a bubbly personality. She was just a darling. She really was. We were very close, and that was a very hard loss.

How did your family handle that? Was there a funeral?

Yes, there was a funeral. They are both buried in Goldfield. In fact, my mother, my father, my grandfather, my aunt; my sister, Lois; my Uncle Frank; my sister, Mary; and my brother, Fayette, are all buried there in Goldfield in a family plot. I think Jack Newton was the undertaker at the time

and . . . of course, they don't call them undertakers anymore—mortician—he took care of both.

You can remember the funeral?

Oh, I can remember it very vividly, yes. I missed a week of school when my sister passed away and a week when my brother passed away. My dad was a firm believer in education, and, I mean, you didn't miss school for just nothing, and you were never late to school. He said it didn't take much to get to school on time, and you better get a good grade in deportment. He said if you didn't get the good grades in the rest, it was because you had to learn, but those manners, you knew. You better be behaved. [laughter] Manners were just . . . With my folks, manners were just really taught to us from the time we were little. There was the "excuse me" and "yes, please." And when an older person came in, you got up and gave him a chair. We were taught manners from the time we were real tiny, and if we don't have them today, it's certainly nothing where my parents lacked, because they were wonderful parents.

They were very clear about that. And so, all those years that you went to school, you traveled back and forth between the two towns. You must feel like a native of both towns to some extent.

Really, I do. Silver Peak was very special, and so was Goldfield. Well, that was our life, and it was wonderful. Because of the transportation back and forth, we didn't lack for anything, love or anything. Like when I was in high school and I wanted to play basketball, my brother, Fayette, would let my brother, Leon, use the car sometimes to take me out to the basketball games, so that I would be able to play, and I did earn my letter in basketball.

Tell me about where you lived. Did your parents have a home in both towns?

Yes, they did. The one in Silver Peak was the mill home. It belonged to the Black Mammoth Mill. The first one I remember was the one that was just down from the mill. It wasn't . . . We had outhouses, and we did have running water in there. We cooked with a wood stove—that was the mill house. But in later years my parents purchased the Minken's house, which was below that, and it was a nicer home, and they had running water. It had a bathroom in it, but it also had the outhouse that you used mostly, because the water situation in Silver Peak was not always that good.

Let's talk about the first house that was owned by the mill and available for people who needed housing.

The very first thing I remembered was them [my parents] in the tent that one summer. Actually, it was just one of these tents that had the board sides that came up about two or three feet with the board floor. It was a one-room tent, and it had a stove, a bed, and a table in there. The folks slept there, and we slept on cots on the hill. But Leon doesn't remember it, and he's older, so I might be wrong on this.

And then, we moved into that mill house. It was fairly good sized. There was a living room and a dining room-kitchen combination, and then there was another room built in the back where the girls slept. Then there was one bedroom.

I can remember, a snake was either brought up or came up through a knothole in the floor, and my mother was deathly afraid of snakes. My cousin, Frances, was there, and Mom got her to come and get rid of it. Frances wasn't afraid of anything: she was such a honey. And she carried it out on a shovel handle. It was just a bullsnake, but my mother made her kill it. She didn't

believe in killing it either, because they do keep down the rattlers, and there were a lot of rattlers.

We had a big table there in the kitchen-dining area. In those days, a lot of your kitchens and dining rooms were together.

You mentioned the water situation. Explain what you mean by that.

We didn't have many lawns or anything like that in Silver Peak, and your water was very alkali.

Did you drink that water, or did you have drinking water hauled in?

My dad always drank the water, because the sink was right over where we made me a bedroom.

But it tasted funny?

I think if you lived with it, you didn't pay any attention. We did have some bottled water, so somebody did bring in water in later years.

After the mill house, you talked about the Minken house. Can you describe that in a little bit more detail?

That house, I always thought, was a nicer home. It had a screened front porch (we'll go from the front in), and then, it had a living room and a kitchen-dining room, and it had two bedrooms and a bath between. So, you see, it did have the modern bath. And then, it had a screened-in back porch. In later years, when I was a little older, they made me a room off of the back porch, which made another small bedroom. I slept out in there, and so that was my own little room when my four sisters were little.

Tell me about school. You went to school in Goldfield, so you never did go to school in Silver Peak?

No, I didn't. Now my sisters, Virginia and Lois, went to Silver Peak school.

Are those the youngest sisters?

Those are the younger, yes. See, my sister, Virginia, is eight years younger than I, and Lois was ten years younger than I. So, when I graduated, Virginia was probably in about the fourth grade, and Lois was probably in the second grade. Then there was a school there, and they did go to school there in Silver Peak. Then, my sister, Virginia, came and lived with me one year in Gabbs and graduated from high school, and then Lois came and lived with me three years up in Gabbs. But then she came back to Yerington and graduated here.

OK. When you graduated from high school in Goldfield, what did you do after high school?

I looked for a job, but I was Fayette Hill's daughter, and he was superintendent of the mill. [laughter] The owners of the store, Gordon Smith and Lindsay, who had the main store and a grocery store, and then Hank Gilbert, who had the dry goods store . . . I happened to be in the dry goods store one day, and I'd hit them all up for a job. I heard them say, "Oh, Gerry ("Geraldine," they called me) was in and applied for a job, but her dad is superintendent of the mills, so I think I'm not going to hire her." It really hit me, because I'm looking for a job. And I'll tell you what, I did [look] for years. Well, it was just because Dad made better wages . . . They figured he could better afford to take care of us than other ones who needed the job more. I don't have any real bad resentment.

It's just that I overheard this conversation, and it kind of hit me at the time.

In fact, I was cashier at the movie house. They had a movie on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and my girlfriend and I worked there. I cashiered the first show and she ushered, and then I ushered at the second show and she cashiered. So we worked in the movie house for fifty cents a night at the time: that was our wages on weekends. And then, I went everywhere looking for a job, and there was a woman down at the powerhouse that did laundry, and I ended up ironing starched white shirts to earn money. (That's why I think all the polyesters are so wonderful today: you don't have to iron them.) And I did that for about a year before I was offered a job. The postmaster had had a couple of married clerks, so she asked my dad one day if he thought I'd be interested in going to work in the post office. So Dad told me to go see her, and Mrs. Mohnike hired me. I was in the post office in Silver Peak for just almost a year, up until my husband and I got married on April 22, 1940. It was where I got my foundation for postal work. I really liked it, but, in those days, it was a lot different than it is today.

Were you one of the few women working then? Do you remember any other women working?

Some of them did, yes, as soda jerks at soda fountains and wherever they needed them. A lot of them did housework. I always babysat. I even babysat for Frances when I was younger.

Did you know any women who worked in the mills or the mines?

No, I did not. I don't recall any women in the mill or any women in the mine. One time I rode in an ore truck up to the Mary Mine when I went up to visit Frances. She

had no fear. I think Uncle Frank and Stanley (but Leon said it couldn't have been Stanley, because he was somewhere else at the time) let us down in an ore bucket by the winch—hand winch, no less. And we walked from up there clear down to the main tunnel at the Mary Mine. But when they put us down in here, they sent word with the ore truck that we were coming through. So, with the tram—the little ore train that went in—they told them we were coming through. At all the different stopes, off to the sides of the tunnels, they would be watching for us to go by. When we went by, they would know approximately where we were, in case something was amiss and we got lost. But Frances knew her way. We went down when the sun was shining; when we came out, here it was pouring rain. It was a wonderful adventure. I just loved it.

I used to ride up on the ore truck from the Black Mammoth Mill to the Mary Mine to visit Frances all the time. Frances lived up on the hill with her dad, and there was a little cabin up there. In fact, one time I met my aunt, who was married to my Uncle Phil at that time. Usually, the person coming down the hill backed up—there were turnouts where you could pass—because the one backing down the hill could lose control so easily. And I can remember Aunt Betty stopped the ore truck. I was with Jimmy Morris, and she made me get out of the truck and made him back down to where she could get by, before I could get back in the truck to go on up.

Is she related to Ruby?

Yes, she's a sister. Oh, Ruby's a darling. She and Frances were the ones that took care of me. They were so sweet.

I wanted to go back to your walk through the mine, because I understand that there's a superstition about having females in the mine. Do you know anything about that?

I had heard that for years and years and years, but for some reason we went through there. It wasn't an easy walk. You had ups and downs, and you had to watch for holes underneath where the train tracks went, but Frances knew it. She used to walk through, I think, more than just the time that I went. We'd go a short ways into the tunnel when I was younger. My dad would be doing some machine work up there and fed the chipmunks during his lunch hour. We used to go up and sit with him, and we'd go into the entrance of the mine. No women worked in the mine. Maybe it was just that they accepted Frances, because she lived up there.

You have some memories of Fred Vollmar, "Fritz" Vollmar, also. Tell me what you remember about him.

He was my dad's immediate boss, and my dad worked under him. But his sister, Johanna Cameron, she had a son Hugh Cameron. And his daughter, Mary [Mary Cameron Frazzini], was a very good friend of mine. So I used to go down to Mary's, and their yard was connected almost to Fritz's. There was just a fence between.

We used to swim in the tank in Mary's mother's yard there. In fact, we swam in lots of tanks up there. We swam in the reservoir. That's where I learned to swim. And Johanna Cameron, who was Fred's sister, taught all of us kids to swim in the reservoir. She'd put a pair of little canvas water wings on us, and we'd be paddling around. Then she'd take them away and put them on the next kid. Well, we found out we were swimming, and then we weren't afraid anymore. That's the way we were taught. We weren't taught the strokes or anything. We were just taught to keep ourself up.

All my years growing up, Fred was always good to many of the young men. He spoiled some of them really badly, but he

was very good to them. He just was a good person. I liked Fred.

Do you have some memories of their home?

Oh, their home was beautiful, and then in later years, because they had a lot of company, they built what they called the guesthouse, and then they had a swimming pool. We used to go up on that hill up behind Vollmar's and the store, and we used to sit up there and watch. Oh, it was beautiful sitting up there, and on one side of the hill there was this green spring. And then there was Nellie Coughlin and her husband—he was a commissioner—and we used to sit up there behind their place. That was just a pastime for us, because we made our own fun.

Oh, we used to walk out there to what was called the coyote dens. It was kind of a flat face out on . . . I think all of this is maybe gone, since they really ruined that beautiful salt flat. The story was that, at one time, they actually had the borax teams in there taking out salt. And when I was young, the whole town would go out, and we'd have picnics, and we'd play "run sheep run" and "steal the sticks" or "kick the can."

Tell me about steal the sticks.

You had sides, and you would divide yourselves into an even number. There's a center line; and on one side, there's a circle here; and on the other side, there's a circle here, like a basketball court. You put ten sticks in each circle, and then the line is the dividing line. If you went over the line and they caught you, then you were in jail. But the object was to try to sneak by these people to get these sticks and bring them back to your own side, and whoever did that first won the game. If you were in jail, you were out of the game for a while. That was the object—eliminating the other side. [laughter]

When we were in town we played “Annie, Annie over.” You have sides again, and you have a house in between, and you throw a ball over. When the other side catches the ball, they run around, and they try to get on this side before somebody catches them.

We walked around up on the mountains, and we swam a lot. It was 110 degrees in the shade in Silver Peak on that salt flat, so we used to walk from where the Black Mammoth Mill was clear down to where the reservoir was . . . never thought anything of that. We’d go down, we’d go swimming, and then we’d walk home again. We swam a lot, and we walked a lot.

Then there was Ma Curran’s As you enter Silver Peak, there was the hot springs, right as you come into town. They had hot tubs that they used to charge a quarter, I think, to take a bath. Also, the reservoir was used as the public bathtub. [laughter] People’d go down to swim after they got off work. They’d all go down there right around four o’clock and take their soap, and they’d soap up and dive in. A lot of them did that because they didn’t have bathrooms like we do today.

Down at Ma Curran’s hot springs, they played bingo, and they had some entertainment and sometimes dances. We went to the dances. They danced all night, because my husband and I, when we were shivareed, we went to the dance, and they wouldn’t let us go home until around five o’clock in the morning. Every Saturday night there was a dance. By Virginia Humphrey’s house there was a bar, and then right behind was another building connected to it—that was the dance hall. (Before that, there was another building up there where Jimmy Gavin was.) When I was little, my folks took me to the dance, but I don’t remember Mom and Dad dancing very much. They used to just take the children and let them sleep on the benches. Wherever they could, they’d

lay a quilt underneath the bench, and they’d put their little one down to sleep.

About midnight they’d stop, and they’d have what they called their midnight lunch. People would take cakes and sandwiches, and then they’d go on and dance some more. When I was a teenager growing up, my dad always made me come home at midnight, because he thought a good girl didn’t stay out after midnight. So I used to dance right up the umpteenth hour, and this lady, whose daughter’s name was Rosie Lano—her name was different, because she remarried after that—she had an old Buick. She used to take us to the dance, and then she’d go out and start the Buick. When the dance was over, I’d run out, and she’d drive me home.

Tell me, did you meet your husband while you were in Silver Peak?

Well, the first time I saw Carl Cooper was when I was a junior in high school in Goldfield, and he was playing ball.

Was he also in high school?

No, no, he had been out. He was nine years older than I. He was working on the railroad at that time, I think. He was playing ball, and the umpire called something, and he just was so mad and so upset. I said to my girlfriend, “Wow, he’s terrible. I don’t like that guy.” We were taught you didn’t yell. If the umpire said it was right, it was right. I thought he was awful. But then I went to work at the picture show, and he came out from Tonopah with the projectors. The way the show was set up, I was selling tickets, and the projector door was right here—I’m sitting there selling tickets; he’s over here showing the movie. And, of course, when the movie’s running, you’re not having to watch it every minute, so I’d look over and think, “Oh, that’s a good-looking guy.” I’d look up, and he’d be watching me.

Well, his sister-in-law lived there in Silver Peak, and at that time I had gone to work in the post office. He told her, "I sure would like to meet that gal."

And Myrtle said, "Oh, I know her," because Myrtle went with my brother at one time—not Leon, but my brother Elwood. She said, "I'll invite her to dinner." So she invited me up for dinner. Then my future husband took me to work, because by then he had moved to Silver Peak and was running a garage and service station in Silver Peak. He was doing the projector only when they needed him. And he asked if he could pick me up after work, and then we started going together. That's how we ended up.

You said something interesting about the projector. At the movie house, the projector did not stay there all week?

No, they carried it back and forth from Tonopah. At that time, I think, they went to Manhattan to show movies, and they went different places with the projectors and the movies to show them.

I see. So it's not like movie houses now, where the projector stays and the movies come and go.

Everything came and went.

Did the movie house have stationary seats in it, or did people take their own chairs?

No, it had seats. It had seats and a screen. The movie house was sitting right next to the store. Originally, the store and the post office were in this one building. You know, where Fred Vollmar's is, and then Johanna's house was next to it? And then there's kind of a vacant lot (I don't know if it's still there), and then the movie house was right there.

When you were dating your husband, what did you do for dates?

We went to dances, and one time he had to make a trip to Mina, and I rode to Mina and back with him. Of course, I had to be in at ten o'clock on weekdays and midnight on weekends. As long as I lived under my dad's house, I obeyed his rules. And he was very I appreciated it in later years, because I was just like that with my own daughters. When I got married, I had a good name, and I thought, "Well, it paid off." [laughter] But when I was young, I thought I was abused by the strictness.

We were the first couple married in Silver Peak, and we were married in my cousin Frances's house. It was a very, very small wedding. There was just family, and Carl's brothers stood up with him, and my sister-in-law, Wilma (Leon's wife), stood up with me. We were married in Frances's front room. That was April 22, 1940, and the lilacs were in bloom in Candelaria at the time, so she had lilacs all over the place. I think that's why I'm so partial to lilacs today. The only outsiders were Mr. and Mrs. Parker from Goldfield, who my dad had worked for in the Ford garage, and they stayed lifelong friends.

OK, and who married you?

Tommy Whyte, who was the first justice of the peace of Silver Peak.

He was the first justice of the peace, and you were the first couple to get married in Silver Peak?

Yes, and he had to go to Tonopah to find out how to marry us. He was going to Tonopah, so my dad took him. But there was my mother; and my sister-in-law, Dorthella; and my sister-in-law, Wilma; and myself and Tommy Whyte. While he went to see what all he had to do, we had to get the license and

all the paperwork done. Well, my dad had just bought a new Lincoln Zephyr at that time. It was brand new, and all of us women—not Tommy—we talked Daddy into seeing how fast it could go. Dad was not a fast driver, but just for a split second, he pushed that up a little ways to show us how fast it could go.

Well, then, later on that year, they had what they called a kangaroo court to raise money for the Christmas party for the children. When they had kangaroo courts, they always charged the men, but they never did charge the women. But that year my husband said to me, “Honey, have you got some money with you?”

And I said, “Oh, no, I’ve got you.”

I couldn’t see any sense in carrying it, but he said, “Well, I think you better take a few dollars with you,” so I did.

Well, then Tommy Whyte called Mom, Wilma, Dode, and me up there, and he charged us with backseat driving. [laughter] But he had asked our husbands if it would be all right. And, of course, they all thought that would be hilarious. When they called us up, of course, we were all flabbergasted, because they never called the women up. It was always the men they charged. [laughter] It was fun, though. We had a good time. Silver Peak was a good place to raise children.

You talked about something that not many people know about today, which is a shivaree. Describe that.

Yes, shivaree. Well, for years, before we were ever married, they always did this. After you were married, the people of the town came to your house, and they used to furnish drinks and some snacks, and they just spent the evening and just had a good time. Well, I’ll have to tell you what ours was like, and that will explain a shivaree. At that time, Mr. Barlow was the sheriff in the town, and so he came in while they were all congratulating us—kind of like a reception,

really. But he took his handcuffs, and he put one on me and one on Carl. So everywhere Carl went, I had to follow him. [laughter]

Before this all started, my mother came by earlier in the evening and was sitting there visiting, and I wondered what was going on. Then it dawned on me when I heard this car drive up. I looked out, and my brother got out of the car, and he ran into the garage. Carl was working on a car and heard him coming, so he crawled under the car, and I ran and hid in the closet, because they had come to shivaree us. Well, they had hooked up a hay wagon on the back of a car, and then, they took Carl and me and put us on it and drove us all over town blowing their horns.

After they all were there at the house for a while, then we went to the dance, and we danced all night. And then, every time Carl and I would go out on the dance floor, they’d play “Here Comes the Bride.” I was young, and I was so bashful, and I know my face was red all night, because we were the only couple on the dance floor—everybody’d leave the floor during that song. Every time we’d try to go home, they wouldn’t let us. So about five o’clock in the morning, about half of them went home with us, and I can remember fixing ham and eggs for everybody at breakfast. And that’s like the shivarees used to be, but it’s more like a reception today.

Your father was superintendent of the Black Mammoth Mill. Did he talk about his work? Do you remember him talking about it at all?

No, [although I know] Dad invented many things that they put into use at the Black Mammoth Mill, but he never patented anything. Of course, Dad and Uncle Frank had a bicycle shop when they were kids. He also had these little steam engine things that he did then, too, so he was always kind of mechanical minded, all his life, but he never

did patent anything. He never bragged about his work or never talked much about his work. He was a very quiet person about things he did.

You would have been a teenager in high school during the Depression years. Do you remember the Depression having any impact on your family?

No, I don't. I know that my father paid some of the wages and stuff on his own during that time. But the Depression never really made a big impression on me, because we did not realize it. We didn't want for anything, really.

And what about World War II? Were you married right before World War II broke out?

When World War II . . . my husband and I lived in Fallon. Kaye [daughter] was a baby, about seven or eight months old. We had moved to Fallon in September, and we had about \$3,000 that was owed to us when we sold the service station and garage in Silver Peak. We never collected that. We owed some bills, so my husband went to work at the Ford garage in Fallon to pay off the bills.

When the war broke out in December, it was a Sunday, and Carl and I were riding around Lake Lahontan with the radio on, because that's the only entertainment we could afford. The announcement came on that we had been bombed at Pearl Harbor.

You were just telling me an interesting story about a Valentine's Dance. Would you describe that again?

Well, I went to the Valentine's Dance over at Fish Lake Valley, when I was about fourteen, with my cousins and some miners from Silver Peak. That was just over the hill if you went by Coyote Springs. At the Molini

Ranch, they had a Valentine Dance, and they had a queen of the ball [contest]. It cost a penny to vote for the queen, and so the miners and the ranchers were voting. Actually, there were a couple of girls from Fish Lake Valley, and then I was from Silver Peak. And when it got right down to the very end, the miners kept saying, "Oh, I've got five dollars in my pocket. I've got ten dollars . . ." The ranchers backed out, and I ended up being queen of the dance that night. [laughter] I didn't intend to put the miners in that position. [laughter] I went with Frances. That's the only time I ever stayed all night at a dance until after I was married.

OK. You mentioned the traveling minister . . .

Reverend Shriver, and he lived in Carson. A lot of these mining towns did not have a minister . . . or did not have churches, actually, but he would come into the different mining towns once a month, or maybe once every three months or six months, whenever he could make it, and he'd have services. In between, some of the women from the different communities got together. They would have a Sunday school, so the children of the town would get the religious training that they needed while they were little. Reverend Shriver came into Silver Peak once a month and held church services in the schoolhouse, and my mother acted as a superintendent of the Sunday school. In fact, I taught Sunday school when I was twelve years old to the real little ones. He did go all over. In fact, there is a book (I hope that it's in the library somewhere) that calls him the "Jackrabbit Minister." And in later years, when I moved to Gabbs and my girls were little, Reverend Shriver also came there. He was a wonderful person, and his wife, she did many, many wonderful things there in Carson. Anyone that ended up in the hospital, she'd give them the New

Testament. And she did that up until . . . I'm not sure whether she's still living, but I think I heard where she just passed away not too many years ago.

When your mother was the superintendent of Sunday schools, where did the women hold the Sunday schools?

They had Sunday school every Sunday in the schoolhouse in Silver Peak.



After you got married, you said you and your husband moved away from Silver Peak. Have you been back?

Oh, I used to go back every year on Memorial Day, because we'd go to the cemetery in Goldfield, and then we'd cut across over to Silver Peak and visit anybody that we knew. I went back with Frank Booth when he was here, and that's been ten years ago.

The last time that you saw Silver Peak, had it changed quite a bit from when you were a child?

Yes, there were so many trailer houses—mobile homes, I should say—compared to what they used to have, and some of the old buildings were gone. And then, the post office was different. When I was in the post office, I was up beyond Baba Shirley's. There was a little house that was a post office, and it was the boardinghouse, too, when Mrs. Mohnike had the boardinghouse and the post office. She was postmaster. At one time, years and years ago, down from where the post office is located now, there was a post office in there.

That's the little, one-room, wooden building?

Yes. And then the beautiful salt flats, they're just dust bowls now. At the time that

I was going back and forth, you did not come in up by Foote Minerals. You came down . . . What was that canyon? I forgot the name of it. You came across an alkali dry lake and down a canyon and across the lower end of the lake. Now they come up the pole line and across by Foote Minerals. It changed the roads.

The roads as well as the lake bed?

Yes. During the good weather, when the lakes weren't wet, we went from Goldfield to Silver Peak, which was thirty-eight miles. And otherwise, we went around by Tonopah, which was seventy-seven miles. So, many mornings on Mondays when we left, we had to go seventy-seven miles to get to school on time.

And when they moved the high school into Silver Peak . . . They had to put it out toward Nivloc, because a high school had to be forty miles from the next high school. Since Silver Peak school would have been just thirty-eight [miles from the Goldfield school], they had to move it up to between Nivloc and the Silver Peak area, outside of town. And one Halloween the town's men got together, and Jimmy Morris, who had the big trucks that did a lot of the ore hauling, he backed in there. They loaded the schoolhouse up, they brought the schoolhouse in, and they set it down next to the grade school. [laughter] The county commissioner at that time was Jack Coughlin. He came up there and told them that they had to move it back, and they said, "Well, it would cost them." I don't know how much he quoted, but a lot, so that the county couldn't afford it. So the school stayed there.

Another interesting thing was Nellie Coughlin . . . There were a lot of donkeys in Silver Peak, and Nellie Coughlin claimed them all. We owned two or three . . . Judy and Heart. But my dad really liked those donkeys, and he always fed them. So, one of

the incidents was when my brother and Hughey Cameron caught a couple of donkeys, and Nellie took out after them, and she took the reins off them. My brothers laid down behind something, and Nellie popped Hughey, which was Fred Vollmar's nephew, and she gave him a spanking right straight out there in the middle of the salt flats. [laughter]

I really enjoyed my childhood growing up in Silver Peak. We made our own fun, and we had a dad and mother that was always . . . Mom took care of all the kids in town. She was just a jewel. It was a good place to grow up. It was a good place to raise a family. Everybody was like a big family. They usually had picnics, and they all seemed to get together. It seemed like everybody took care of everybody else. In fact, my mother never swam a stroke (my father was a good swimmer), but if those kids all wanted to go swimming, they'd [the parents would] all trust my mother to take every kid in town down swimming. They had enough confidence that Mom would make sure that, if somebody got in trouble, somebody would be in there to get them. But that's the type of a town it was. People just loved each other and trusted each other. Very fond memories. Plus it's where I got married, and that's where I was more or less brought up.

And was your daughter born there?

Yes, right. Anyone, when they had their babies, took a mad dash to Tonopah, and several children were born at Millers, because they couldn't quite make it to Tonopah.

And where's Millers?

It's this side of Tonopah, probably about fifteen miles or so. But when I had my daughter, I went to Tonopah when I started in labor, and it was false labor. So I went

home, and the doctors said come back in ten days. Ten days, I went back, and I had my daughter there in the Tonopah hospital, which is now at Coaldale, and it's the bar and restaurant. They moved that building from Tonopah out there.

But that's the way we did . . . When you went to the doctor, you went to Tonopah. When you did your banking, you went to Tonopah to the First National Bank. It was called First National Bank, not First Interstate.

When they melted the gold down (after I was older . . . by then there were just the five of us girls at home), my dad never told my mother when they were melting the bullion, because he didn't want anyone to know that he was getting ready to ship a bar of bullion. And they'd melt the bullion down, and they'd pour it. It was a beautiful sight, to see it poured from the crucible into the bars, about that long and about that wide.

It looks like a little over a foot by three or four inches wide.

It would be sometimes smaller, sometimes bigger. And that bar of gold would set up, and it would be worth from \$20,000 up to \$40,000. My dad would come home about a half hour before he was ready to go to Tonopah, and he would tell my mother that we were going to Tonopah in a half hour, so she didn't have a chance to tell anybody, either. He'd put that gold brick in an ore sack and shove it under the seat of the car, and then we'd get in the car and head for Tonopah. He'd take it to the bank and have it drilled for value, and then he'd take it to the express office and express it out. My father was a good-sized man, and it's all he could do sometimes to carry that brick—it was so heavy. But that's the way they did it when they had the cyanide plant. He carried all those bricks, all those years, and never once did he ever lose one.

And so, part of the security system was that he just didn't tell anybody when it was time to pour it?

That's right. And then, it looked like a family on a family outing. There were five of us girls. I can remember for years doing it, probably from me clear down to my little sister. [laughter] Lots of times we'd be combing a little one's hair and changing the dress on the way or whatever. [laughter]

We didn't have phones in Silver Peak. My dad, every morning when he was working, we'd go down to the powerhouse and phone. I don't know who he phoned or what information it was. It was a business call. That was the only phone in town. I know we never had a phone. We never thought about phones. You know, if you don't have it, you don't miss it. [laughter]

What about food and clothing? Do you remember where your mom got those kinds of things?

Tonopah mostly. We'd go shopping in Tonopah, but we had a store. We had somebody who trucked from Bishop in to Silver Peak with vegetables and fruits, fresh produce. And then, in later years, we did have a store in Silver Peak, because the Smiths ran it, the Smith brothers. They had a store and a soda fountain, kind of by where

the picture show was at one time. And they also had the post office in that building. And then there was Hank Gilbert, and he had dry goods. So they did buy some of their clothing from Hank Gilbert, which was up where Mrs. Shirley lived. There was a store in there. Hank Gilbert later went to Hawthorne.

And we had another little store, Oscar Olsen, up there by where Jimmy Gavin's place was. Several things have been in that place. He had a little store, and he went to Los Angeles to pick up fresh vegetables and fruit.

And this would have been in the 1930s, when you were in high school? That was a good time in terms of the mining and milling business? There were jobs and stores, and there was quite a bit going on in Silver Peak?

Well, yes. Silver Peak didn't really start to really go down until about the time I graduated from high school. Goldfield went down years ago, when the mining quit, but Silver Peak was still going.

Yes, until the war shut those mines down.

Yes. I moved away just a few months before that.

RUBY GRIFFIN

***R**UBY GRIFFIN was a divorced, single mother in the early 1930s when she arrived in Silver Peak. Unable to find a job during the Depression in her home state of Texas, she joined her sister at Silver Peak and lived at the Mary Mine. When she met and married Ernie Shirley, she also joined “the clan,” a group of families that constituted the life force of Silver Peak throughout the 1930s and beyond. Three women from this group (Ruby, Frances Hill Chiatovich and Virginia Shirley Humphrey) operated the store/restaurant/bar. Ruby went on to serve as postmaster for forty-seven years. During that time, the building that housed their businesses burned in a spectacular and devastating fire. However, Ruby saved the mail and reopened the post office and grocery store as soon as possible. When World War II broke out, her husband went for his military exam, but was refused. His lungs were damaged by silicosis. Ruby’s oral history described the slow deterioration of Ernie’s health from miner’s consumption.*



VICTORIA FORD: Today is August 12, 1996, and I am here with Ruby Griffin at Mineral Ridge Resources’ office in Silver Peak, Nevada. Vivian Bartak is going to sit in with us, but primarily this is going to be an interview with Ruby about her time at Silver Peak. She has been here since the 1930s and was postmaster for forty-seven years.

RUBY GRIFFIN [RG]: It's been a long time, but it's been a very good long time. I wouldn't trade for it. As a matter of fact, we have that house in Hawthorne. We started fixing it up, but when I retired, I didn't want to move. I wanted to stay here, and so we're still here, and the house is still over there and still not fixed up. [laughter]

You were born in Texas, is that right?

RG: I was born in Texas in 1910. I was born near Jaytoen, Texas.

And how did you arrive in Nevada? Did your family move here?

RG: Well, no. I came here alone. [laughter] Right at that time, they had a law in Texas They were trying to keep more people from coming in[to the state] and applying for jobs, although I was from Texas, and I was free to go and come as I pleased. Well, I knew this man, and he had a variety store just over the line from Jal, New Mexico, and my sister lived in Jal. I put my application in with him, but he had a girl working for him. Until she got a job somewhere else, I was waiting, and he said she wouldn't be there very long. I was next in line, but her job didn't turn up. In the meantime, my sister, Betty Grice, lived out here in Silver Peak. Betty and I are not even two years apart in our age, but I hadn't seen her in some time. She came down, and they talked me into coming back out here.

This was after you went to high school in Texas?

RG: Oh, I did all of my education in Texas.

So you finished high school, and then you were out looking for a job when all of this happened?

RG: First, I got married, and then I was going back into Texas to get a job, but then I found out that I had to get a job *before* I could get back into Texas. Well, then I wasn't about to go back down there.

I see. So did you move here with your husband?

RG: No, we split up. We were in California, and I had this little boy. Then I moved back to New Mexico with my sister, and I was wanting to get back home into Texas. I didn't want to go down to my father's place. It's not home there, because I had a stepmother, and I wasn't about to go back there. But I wanted to get back into the state, so I would be close to the brothers and sisters I had down there. Most of them were scattered around by then. So that's how I ended up here, and I've been here ever since.

OK. And that was about 1933 that you arrived. And where did you live when you first moved to town?

RG: Well, I lived up at the Mary Mine at my sister Betty's house. She was married to Frank Hill. He had an operation going up there. It was for the same company. His daughter, Frances Hill, lived there, too. She was going with Stan Chiatovich then, and then his cousin was Ernie Shirley. That's how I met Ernie.

You and Frances were dating these two fellows?

RG: Right. Ernie and I got married before she and Stan did for some reason. Then we stood up with them later when they got married.

After you married Ernie, did you still live up by the Mary Mine?

RG: Yes, he had a house up there at the Mary Mine.

What was his job at the Mary Mine at that point?

RG: Well, he was a leaser at that time, he and Stanley Chiatovich. They had a company between them, and then they only had about four or five men working for them on this lease.

We lived there for about a year, but we had to move into Silver Peak. It would be too much of a nuisance to try to drive all that way, especially in the wintertime, so my son could go to school [in Silver Peak]. The house where we're living now was for sale, and so Ernie just bought it. We moved down here into this house, and I have been here ever since. [laughter] It has been remodeled since.

But let's go back to the house up at the Mary Mine that you and Ernie first lived in.

RG: Yes. It was a three-room house, and it was right on the hillside where you could look all over this big, immense valley down here. I just loved it. I thought it was just grandeur to have that three-room house. The rooms were nice sized. The kitchen and dining room were together, and then we had the living room and the bedroom.

And where did your son sleep, with just the one bedroom?

RG: We put him in the living room. We had the bed in there . . . it was just a narrow bed, just a cot really, that we bought second-hand. There was a big step outside, and we had chairs out there. I guess they built it meaning it for a porch, but it didn't have a roof over it. It was just a big floor out there. In the bedroom there was a closet, and then

in the living room there was a nice-sized closet. I had plenty of storage space.

Did you have running water?

RG: Oh, no. It had to be hauled up there in a barrel.

And did it have an outhouse or a privy outside for a bathroom?

RG: Just an outhouse. I'll have to tell you about that privy. [laughter] Ernie used to watch me go out there. He was just sure I was going to fall off of that. Whoever built it was a clown, and they built that on stilts. They had boarded it all the way to down below. You had to go out across this rickety walk: it was a regular little bridge with a post and a railing built all the way to the building that you could hold onto, but just on one side. It wasn't that wide, eighteen inches, and he always told me, "Don't forget to hold onto that all the way. Let your hand slide along." [laughter] He could just see me falling down there about fifteen or twenty feet.

I've been up there, and some of those old cabins look like they're right on the road and right up against the mountain. Did your house have a yard around it, or was it right near the road?

RG: Well, this one was built downhill from the road, and then you had to walk over to the mill. Apparently, whoever built it worked at the mill or perhaps was the mill foreman. Where the road turns there's kind of a "V" there, and there used to be a bar there. Well, to get to the bar, you came down that road. I was glad we weren't on the same side of the road, because so many men were going to the bar and back all that time, and they might get in a habit of thinking they had to stop. But to get down to our house, they would have had to come down this trail

that was pretty steep. [laughter] We both liked that idea.

You had a little more privacy that way?

RG: Yes, we did. When we were sitting on the porch, we would hear them going by up there. As a matter of fact, some of them had the habit of bouncing rocks off our roof. It was a good thing that we had a tin roof, because you would hear a bang! At the mine, Ernie went by the name of "Mac," and they would yell down, "Are you awake, Mac? Are you down there? What are you up to?" But it was nice living up there, and we would have continued living up there but for the school situation. It was just beautiful. It was cooler up there in the summertime. In the wintertime, I'm sure it was colder, but it wasn't bad in the wintertime either.

Once you moved down here and bought this house, then did your husband go back and forth to the mine everyday?

RG: Yes. There were other miners that needed to go up, and so did Stan (he and Frances were married at that time), so then they bought this car. It was a Marquette. They used to haul the miners back and forth. They had a carload every time. Those old cars, they were built roomier, and they would just pile in there. [laughter] If more needed to ride, they'd make room for them, because some of them that lived up there would come down here and stay overnight lots of times. Whoever wanted to ride was welcome to ride.

By then you were married to Ernie, and you had a little boy in school, so what did you do with your time while he was in school?

RG: I worked around the yard and everything. There was sagebrush right in the yard, and I started right in putting in a garden. And then, when the town died

down, we bought the grocery store out and the bar—Frances and I and Virginia Humphrey (she was Ernie's sister) and her husband. They lived here in the Peak. And we ran that for years.

Now, when you say "when the town died out," was that World War II? Was that when that started?

RG: Yes. Yes, when they closed the mines down. But up until then, there were always odd jobs turning up, like elections. I always got in on all of those.

And then we got involved in the park at the Nivloc, and then the next thing we got involved in was a swimming pool.

Tell me about that park. Tell me who was in that group, and then describe how you built that park.

RG: Well, we just took toilets and old furniture up there, and we put some tables up there. The men, they got rocks and built some fireplaces, so they could put grills on it. That way we could cook when we went up there. Even if we did the cooking ahead of time, it made it awful nice to have those big grills to put your stuff on, to build the fire and keep it hot until the crowd all got there.

Was this for camping overnight, or was this mostly for picnics?

RG: It was mostly for picnics, but there were different ones that stayed overnight, and through the years they continued to camp up there overnight. They had some wild parties up there. (Vivian, you should remember this.) Remember when Harvey Humphrey, when they fined him. I mean, his wife had died. And there was this group that used to use dope that was around here, and I knew he was going up with them. The rest of us avoided those parties . . . none of us ever got involved in that. We drank, but

not He was my neighbor and still in the family, and so I asked him, "Harvey, are you going up to that bunch."

He said, "Yes, they're good people. What's wrong with them?"

I said, "Nothing, but they've got a pretty good reputation on that dope list."

And he said, "Yes, they say that. I've never seen any of that around."

And I said, "I know you don't use dope." This was later. I think this was after the war when drug use started up again.

VIVIAN BARTAK [VB]: I think it was around 1965, 1966, 1967. When I moved down here, they had tramp miners here—that was Mid-Continent—and they drank. And then, when those tramp miners moved, the next ones moved in, and that's when we got the dope.

But that was long after you created the Nivloc Park, is that right? You told a funny story about some problems up there at one point with that park?

RG: Oh, right. [laughter] Well, we started the park. And in the meantime, people started camping there two or three days. They didn't want it made into a park—they wanted it for their own private use. They said we were taking over. We weren't. We were the ones that had started it originally, and then they went up there and thought they had really found something.

So we just decided that we were going up there. We had a pickup, and I was driving it. And this fellow was trying to pass me and started forcing me off the road, but it was wide enough that I just moved over and just got ahead of him and went on. Well, the women that were with me, including Frances, said, "Ruby, he's going to hit you."

I said, "I've got room to drive. As long as I can drive, I can get ahead of him. I know who he is," I said, "I think he must be drunk."

Well, we got up there, and we got everything ready for serving. Everyone was going to have to buy their food that day. That was when the money was going into the swimming pool down here in Silver Peak. We didn't charge the price you would pay in a cafe, but we had signs up—so much for a hamburger and such. Anyway, we had things going, we thought, pretty well, when they just came up and said, "Well, the party's over." They just started trying to tear everything up. And of course, that just started a fight—the men and the women, too. We just let them have it. [laughter]

Were you slugging it out, too, Ruby?

RG: That's right! Anyway, can you believe that we just got a downpour of rain at that time? That was the funniest thing. I was so glad. [laughter] Oh, we just grabbed everything like crazy, because we were right in a place where a cloud burst hit us, and it could have caused a flash flood. Some of them were still fighting. We were still loading up and everything.

Did you raise any money that day? [laughter]

RG: We didn't think we came out much ahead. [laughter] It was just so wild But this is what I liked about it: when we came down, everybody laughed, "We won . . . beat the tar out of them."

Well, this one fellow, he was a big, heavyset fellow. He was still mad. I don't know if he ever Some people can't give in and admit a loss. Well, then there were still different ones who said they were laying for him. If he did one thing wrong, they were going to beat the tar out of him. But he ran into problems anyway. His wife left him—not because of that, she had it all planned at the time. She left him for another fellow. So he was kind of tore up after that. Some said, "Well, that fight had a lot to do with it."

I said, "I don't think so." I think she just used that as an excuse while he was mad and they were fighting. Anyway, the conflict just died. We just took care of it then, and that was the end of it. Oh, we'd talk and laugh about it to ourselves, because we thought we won. [laughter] How can you win in a downpour?!

Did the park exist after that, or was that the end of the park?

RG: No, the park still existed, and different ones used to go up there and stay. Some of them stayed three or four days one time. They had another party up there, and I didn't go up there, because I was working that day at the post office, and that is when Harvey messed around . . . he was up there. I'll say he messed around.

VB: When did they build that lake up there?

RG: Oh, Elton Parsons built the lake. Somehow or another we did get \$1,100 and paid him. Well, that sounds like a lot, but for the amount of work and the days that he went up there and had his men and his equipment up there, that wasn't a drop in the bucket. He closed in the canyon, and then the water from the Nivloc went into that lake. Then the state furnished the fish, and they planted fish for kids.

Is the lake still there?

RG: No. Something should have been done about this and could have, too. I guess the state demanded that they close up the Nivloc. And when they did, they closed this tunnel where the water came out that watered birds and chickens, and there were fish in that lake. It just dried up. The state is not supposed to do that, to cut off water from an area that has wild animals of any sort or game watering at it.

You said that you and Frances Chiatovich and Virginia Humphrey bought and operated the grocery store and bar.

RG: That's right. It was Smith Brothers' store. That is when I took over the post office. It was a large building that burned down while we had the post office in it. It was also a grocery store, and we had a meat market. They had had a lumber company, too, so there was a large platform and building.

We all shared the work. I was the postmaster. That's when I took over the post office from Claire. [According to Ruby's records, she assumed the position of postmaster November 8, 1944, from Mrs. Claire Curran, who served as acting director from July 1, 1943.] But everybody helped run the store, and everyone worked at the bar. When the mail came in, one of us was always there to take over everything else while I just took care of the mail. We had it lined out. It worked real good.

I had Sunday off, and we didn't keep as long of hours on a Saturday. But really, it was hard to cut any hours off for the simple reason of the way the mail would come in. It came in just once a day. At that time, the mail would come from Big Pine, and it went on over to Goldfield. The next day it came in from Goldfield and went the other direction. The mail carrier stayed overnight in Goldfield: he had a cabin over there. And that went on for several years. Well, he would come in the morning, but it varied depending on which direction he was coming from. I think that he got in about ten-thirty or eleven o'clock. And it varied in the wintertime, because sometimes he had trouble getting over that mountain. But then, the next day he would be coming from Goldfield, so he would get there, and he just had a short drive then.

Was this during World War II, or was it right after? And were the mines shut down?

RG: Yes, they were. I took over November 8, 1944.

So what happened to the population in Silver Peak then? Was it pretty small?

RG: Yes, it was. I'll tell you the ones of us that stayed, and the ones that had to go to service. It was quite a comedy for a while. Ernie went. They sent him as far as Salt Lake City, but then he couldn't pass the test to get into the military. He had been in the mines too long—his lungs.

Is that when they first found out he had trouble with his lungs? Was that the first that you knew of that?

RG: Yes, and he didn't believe it. When he came back, he just said, "Oh, I didn't get a thorough examination." But he did, because his lungs . . . He couldn't pass. I had a brother who was working around here, and when they didn't pass him in Salt Lake, he came back and was just fit to be tied. He was a younger brother, but he did go in the navy. Then they called in everybody that had examinations—they called them in again and went over it again. Well, then they took my brother, Fred, but his problem was a heart condition of some sort that he was born with. They called them "blue babies."

But when they called Ernie again, he said they never even gave him all of his tests the first time, and he told me, "Now, this time they're going to test me like I want them to test me." He really had a lot of determination. But determination or not, he had silicosis.

Well, he came back that time, and he decided he would go to Tonopah. We knew the doctor over there real well. He was going to have them x-ray him again. Well, I was

with him, and the doctor over there didn't want to test him. He kept telling him, "Forget it. Forget it."

"No," Ernie said, "I'm not going to forget it. I want my lungs x-rayed. You're the one that takes x-rays of everybody that works in the mines, and you're going to x-ray me."

And so the doctor x-rayed him. When he come out, he told him, "Well, your lungs are bad, but they're not so awful bad."

Ernie said, "All right, I want to see the x-ray. I'm not leaving this office. I paid for that x-ray, and I'm going to see it!"

The doctor didn't want to, but he came out of there, and he was so mad that he threw that x-ray at him. He says, "Take the goddamn thing and look at it. I don't know how you ever got the silicosis you got, but it looks to me like somebody shot you in the lungs with a shotgun." That's just what he told him. And so, it was bad.

Then he decided he would go to Carson City. He wouldn't let me go with him and drive or anything. He said, "I'm going up on the bus, and I may be up there a week. But I'm going to be x-rayed, and I'm going to see what they can do for me." So we took him over to Coaldale, and he went up there. They couldn't do anything for him. His lungs were gone. There was no hope. There was nothing they could do for him.

Was he still able to work at that point?

RG: Yes. Well, he could still work, but I think he got tired quicker than the others did because of his lungs. But some people have a lot of determination. He was one of the ballplayers, and he would just bend over with breathing after he would run. But when I said, "I don't think you should run because of your breathing," he said, "My breathing's all right. Everybody does that."

I said, "OK." You know, it's wonderful when you've got that much determination, but sometimes it doesn't do you any good.

Did he continue working in the mines after he found out?

RG: Yes.

Did he think he had been careful?

RG: Yes, and he had bought those wet . . . you know, those breathers [respirators]. They have better ones now. He wore that on his face, and he was careful, but not careful enough. I think that he would take it off, or he got all the way out of the mine and thought the danger was gone. Especially with the men talking to him, he would take it off while telling them what to do. And I think he took it off a lot more than he realized he did. Even though he was the boss, if it was in places where he wanted it to be exact, he did the drilling—he sure those blasts went off just exactly like he wanted them to and headed right in the direction he wanted to. And I think he just did that too often.

Well, you hadn't been married very long when this happened then?

RG: When he found that out, but then he lived fifteen more years and died in 1959. He went right on working, right on up to the last.

How did you feel about it when you found out about what he had?

RG: Well, when you were living with them, and they just go ahead strong like that, and he had lots of willpower, there's nothing that I could do. You're not going to talk about it unless it comes up, because . . . Well, it makes anyone angry that has something wrong with them, and they think you're trying to make it worse than they think it is. And so then, you just avoid that one subject. We avoided, and we didn't really talk about it. Like when I wanted to go up to Carson City with him,

and he said, "No, I want to go up by myself. I want to see what they can do for me."

And then I said, "Well, all right. All right then." It was his body: he wanted to do it his way. And it upset him, so that certainly didn't do him any good.

He loved mining, did he?

RG: Yes, he did, and he was a good miner. He kept up on everything. At one time, they tried to get the school of mines up here, but they just had one winter of it. When they had the school of mines, they learned a lot, and then they had their books to go back to. He kept up with all of that stuff.

Did he talk about his work to you?

RG: Yes, he discussed mining a lot. And there was always someone there at the house seeing him about something. [laughter]

It sounds like you understood what his work was and how proud he was of his work.

RG: And he was, and he kept up with all of the news on it.

Was it changing pretty quickly? Was technology improving?

RG: That's right. And they had meetings here in town quite often. They finally got that school of mines, and they thought they really had a large group who could attend, but finally, people couldn't afford it, and they didn't have enough students.

Are you talking about the school of mines at the university?

RG: Well, it was the university that put it on, and the teacher came down once a

week that one winter. Ernie went to those classes, and I think they learned a lot, because they were all interested, and you learn a lot when you're interested.

So the whole time that you were married, was he working strictly at the Mary Mine?

RG: Yes.

And you were at the post office, and you watched the Silver Peak population going downhill during the war. When did you see it start to come back up?

RG: I have seen it go up and down. [laughter] I'm always glad when it's going up, not when it is going down. It is really kind of down right now, and we don't really have very many businesses or anything.

You like it when the town is busy and people are living here?

RG: Going full blast. But that happens in these mining communities.

So your job was often determined by how big the town was and how well the mining industry was going, because you were probably more busy when the mines were busy. I would also think that the post office would be the center of information, because you would see mail coming in and out of mining businesses and people's homes and have some sense of legal documents . . .

RG: The importance of them. Yes, and just from different people coming in and talking to me, I knew that it's on the upward curve. And then they do a lot of talking in the post office, if they meet the others and discuss things, so you can hear what's going on—what's for the good of the town and the good of the mines. I hope it lasts forever.

What did you like about being postmaster?

RG: Well, I liked to work with people, and I like people. It's interesting to see them every day, and it seems like you always hear the good.

Were there ever any serious accidents up in the mines while you were postmaster?

RG: Well, this one fellow fell down the chute one time and got killed, but we didn't have any explosions or anything, did we?

VB: I think there's some of the miners buried up there in one of the mines.

RG: Oh, yes. Yes. They had a cave-in. Yes.

Early 1960s?

RG: Yes, they did, and that was a terrible thing that happened.

There were several people killed in that, is that right?

RG: I think there must have been about three men killed in that. That was a cave-in up at Nivloc. I knew them. I was trying to think if they were married or not. I don't remember their wives. It's been a long time ago. They never did find them. They didn't find the bodies. They searched so long and then just gave up and closed that part of the mine forever. But the mine had been closed down, and they had a lease on it.

So it wasn't a full-scale operation? There were just a few of them to begin with?

RG: No, it wasn't. That's right.

But you have been here since 1933. You've been here sixty-three years, so that's not many accidents in that time, really.

RG: No, it isn't.

Were there more problems from silicosis than accidents around here in terms of health problems?

RG: Well, I don't know. You know, with silicosis so many times they always seem to die of pneumonia or something else instead. You never knew.

You must have seen a lot of changes at the postal service, from the time you started during World War II up to today when we have overnight mail. Did you see a lot of changes right here in Silver Peak, too, in the speed of the mail and the technology?

RG: Yes. We had improvements. The mail has always come in once a day and gone out once a day. That never did change, but they did change the way it came in. It used to come in from California first, and, oh, we got so many complaints when they changed it, because so many people ordered general from the catalog—Sears and Montgomery Ward from California. It's unbelievable the way you could just order down there, and it would come right on back up so fast—maybe two days. Well, then it didn't come up so fast when it changed and came from Las Vegas. That slowed it down, and it took about a week to get up here. Well, that was when Mitch [Hallis] took over.

VB: Because when I moved down here in 1967, Virginia was hauling mail, then it was Mitch Hallis.

And catalog orders were an important source of goods?

RG: Yes, it was.

Because you didn't have clothing stores here?

RG: That's right. They claimed when they had made the change that it would be for the better, that it would bring the mail in faster. They always tell you that. [laughter]

VB: We used to have a Tonopah sack, a Bishop sack, and a Vegas sack.

RG: Three of them, and we separated that ourselves.

VB: Now all we have is two Las Vegas sacks. One of them is for 890 [ZIP code] and the mail that goes out of state. And the other one is for the ZIP code 890 to 898, and then it goes to an Arizona ZIP code. And then we have our registered sack that goes out. So I send three sacks now, but all of Bishop's mail and all of Tonopah, Goldfield . . . all of that all goes down now to Las Vegas, and then it has to come back up the next morning. And that even includes their bank deposits. If they bank in Tonopah, it always comes back up the next morning. Before, when it left my place at ten in the morning, by one, two o'clock in the afternoon, it was put in their boxes in Tonopah. It would be banked that day. Now they have to wait until the next day. And some of them don't dare write a check until they know that their deposit is made.

Tell me about the fire.

RG: We had this post office and grocery store and bar. One of our refrigerators had stopped, and we sent it to get fixed. It was several days before we got it back. We had just gotten it back, and the next morning everything was all right when Marco Chiatovich, who was the mail carrier and had a key to the grocery store, came in and picked that up. (He did not have a key to the post office, because I would just leave the sacks after they were fixed at the door.) He left right after six o'clock in the morning.

We decided that refrigerator must have set the fire off [after he left].

Well, you see, we didn't open up until nine. Before we opened someone told us that the building was on fire, so we rushed down there. Well, in the far end was the post office with a big plate-glass window, so we just broke that, and I got in there and saved all of the mail! Even saved the old desk we used. I was determined to get everything, including all of the old records I had at the post office. I saved every bit of that.

The post office was closed off from where the fire was going in the grocery store. They were screaming at me, "Get out of there!" Well, I was safe in there. I knew I was. Sure, I could see there was smoke starting to come in around the door, but there was no danger to it. And not a one of our three husbands was in town: they were all up at the mine working.

So it was up to you women?

RG: And the men around town, that's all. There was a fire and, "Come and help." They all did help in small towns.

You didn't have a fire truck in town at that time?

RG: No.

Or anything? It was all fought by hand?

RG: That's right. The entire building went. Everything. But I took all of the mail out of all of everybody's boxes, so I saved all of that.

So when the building burned down, what did you do for a post-office building then?

RG: Well, when this Black Mammoth building went up for sale, we acquired that and moved over there. Then I moved into the small, one-room, wooden building

which is still standing near the mobile home that is the post office today.

You've retired just in the last four years, right? 1992?

RG: Well, you see, they try to keep you from working over thirty years in the post office, and I had a lot more than that.

You worked forty-seven years, is that right?

RG: Yes. So that was the reason they were putting the pressure on me to retire. But they can't put any real pressure on you, because as long as you keep your record clear and are taking care of everything, they can't do a thing about it. They can remind you and tell you that you don't get any more on your retirement—that's all. You're not working for your retirement anymore. Your retirement is full.

So why did you decide to retire?

RG: Well, of all of the dumb things, when I walk, I have always had trouble with bumping my heel onto my ankles. Isn't that stupid, that you can't straighten yourself out to walk differently? [laughter] And so I had gotten an infection in my ankle, in my leg. And so it was bad, and they were usually reminding me, and I had to take some time off anyway with it. I'm still doctoring with it, and it's all swelled up, and I've got a couple of abscesses on it. If there's anything I could never stand, I never could stand a sore on me.

Do you miss the work?

RG: Yes, I do. I was just lost. But knowing that I was supposed to stay off my foot, and I was supposed to keep it up, I thought, "They're piling a little too much on me. I feel sorry for me." [laughter]



“There was a fire and. . . the entire building went. . . Then I moved into the small, one-room, wooden building which is still standing near the mobile home that is the post office today.”



[NOTE: The third taped interview with Ruby Griffin was conducted in her home in Silver Peak, and her husband Milton “Griff” Griffin joined us.]

When you and Ernie were dating, when you first came here, what were dates like back in the 1930s?

RG: Well, they had dances down here at least once a week at that Black Mammoth building, and they used that for a dance hall. There had been several bars there, but it was empty at the time. Later someone started a bar and cafe in there. We had lots of picnics, too. Sometimes there would be two or three couples that just grabbed their food and

would go out to picnic. It seems like we were always running around.

For the dances, did you dress up? Did you have party dresses?

RG: If we had the music come in, we did, but then there were about three fiddlers around here in town that would get up there and play music. Then we had our record players, and we would dance by that.

And those weren’t quite such fancy occasions?

RG: No. We used to “come as you are.”

Is that house [at the Mary Mine] still standing?

RG: No, it isn't anymore.

MILTON "GRIFF" GRIFFIN [GG]: Somebody burnt the bunkhouse down here a couple of years ago.

RG: Yes, and what a shame that was, you know. That was a two-story building. It was built out of real good lumber. That was sturdy, and it just wasn't an old thing that would fall down. There were two bunkhouses up above. And that big building, it had rooms all up above it. Whoever was the cook and whoever was running the place at the time, they had living quarters up there.

Was that up there when you were living there?

RG: Yes. It had been there for years and years. Even when the old road was there, and they hauled the ore out by horses and wagons.

And were people in them when you were living up there with Ernie?

RG: Yes, everything was full up there. There wasn't a building that was empty. Well, at that time driving all the way down here, transportation was a problem for the working men. And the expense of gasoline going back and forth. It was wear and tear on the cars. The road was worked and passable all the time, but it wasn't like a good road you would drive a car over all of the time. A lot of people down here didn't like to drive their car up there at all. It was steep, and a lot of the cars had trouble getting up there. And everyone that lived up there was always doing some work on their building, fixing it up and keeping it repaired.

This was in the 1930s which were Depression years, but this was a busy place then?

RG: Yes, it was.

There were good jobs available?

RG: Yes, there were. And they didn't have troubles getting miners. Of course, their law then was anyone under twenty-one couldn't go underground, which was a good law.

Did they ever let the women work underground?

RG: Not at that time, they didn't allow any.

Why is that?

RG: Well, at that time there were a lot of places that women couldn't work, because they weren't strong enough.

GG: No, women just didn't cope with that kind of job then either.

RG: No. It was later when the court said they could apply, but the mining companies, they wanted men. When it comes right down to it, women are not as strong as men.

When you and Ernie got married, where was that wedding held?

RG: Well, we got married in Goldfield. We had other plans . . . we kind of planned on getting married out here, but then we had to go to Goldfield to get our license and all of that.

Because that's the county seat for this county?

RG: Yes. And so we decided we would just go ahead and get married while we were over there. And that's what we did. Just the two of us. I think Frances was with us.

Maybe Stan was, too. He was Ernie's cousin—not only his cousin, but also his partner, and they had a lease up at the Mary Mine.

And then did you have a honeymoon after you got married to Ernie, or did he have to get back to work?

RG: No. We just came right on back, and he had to get back to work.

Did you go with Frances and Stan on their honeymoon? They got married after you, is that right?

RG: That's right. We stood up with them at the wedding. And then we went right on down to Las Vegas, and we stayed a week down in Las Vegas. We went down on the river and looked around. The dam [Hoover Dam] wasn't in at that time, but they were starting to build it. There was a beach there, so we went down on the beach, and then we went on down and looked at where they were going to put the road across. Just from a distance, because that was kind of rough country getting over there.

Las Vegas must have been a small town then in the 1930s?

RG: Well, I will tell you that it was a booming town at that time—hard to get a place to stay, and the streets were just crowded all of the time. Well, they were starting to come in to go to work on that dam, and the campgrounds and everything else was just full of people.

Because they didn't have enough houses for everybody when that started?

RG: No, they didn't, and so many of them that came in didn't have the money to rent a house anyway. They were camping

out a lot, and down there the weather is nice. And you didn't dare go around any of those campgrounds, because they were just full of people that were looking for work, which we were not. One thing that has always amazed me There was an artesian well out on this side of Las Vegas, and there was a large area there where they wouldn't allow anyone to camp. But my word! People were just camping as close as they could get with old cars and trailers and anything . . . with a trailer they had fixed up themselves—any kind of an old rickety trailer, they had made themselves a home in it, just a sleeping place. At places they wouldn't allow them to build a campfire. They were keeping them under control. [laughter] When we went down there, there were people everywhere.

So where did you stay?

RG: It was in a motel right up town Well, there were always rooms you could get: if people had the money, they could rent a room. [laughter]

So did you see any casino shows while you were there?

RG: Yes. We went around, and there were shows.

Did you do any gambling?

RG: None of us were gamblers. We went to where the slot machines were and just played for a few minutes and went on. But there were so many other things that we did. We didn't hang around those places or hang around the bars, because I didn't drink. Frances didn't drink. Ernie and Stan weren't much on the drinking either. In the evenings, yes. Then we would go into places and have drinks. But at that time, I didn't drink at all, and Frances never did drink, not even to the last, she didn't drink. She never did start drinking.

So did you do any shopping? What else did you do there?

RG: Oh, yes. We did some shopping. And then Ernie's sister and brother-in-law were down there, the Gilberts. And he was working for the tax commission, and they had two kids. We would try to get together with them and go out—get out of town and go to places. We ate in places where we could take the kids that weren't so crowded.

Did you have your son, Don, with you at that time?

RG: No, I didn't take him along. I had a sister living here. She was married to Frank Hill, Frances's father, and Don stayed with them.

And you were really good friends with Frances?

RG: Yes, we were, and we were to the very last. As a matter of fact, she would always say, "Well, you are my best friend." And her kids told me that all of the time. We were the best of friends. She was a very nice person. And she was very interesting. She did lots of handwork of all sorts, and she was a good housekeeper. She had a lovely house there in Yerington.

Barbara Dodgion, Frances' daughter, said that she can remember when she was a little girl, that you and Frances went for walks every evening.

RG: Well, we did. Mostly we followed the same route. We would just go out of town down by the powerhouse and go right out on that road and then go out there on the flat. The reason that we did, it was easy walking. If you started walking here in town (of course, their parents didn't mind) the kids went with us. Well, it was just like the Pied Piper almost. And Frances always had a dog,

and I always had a dog, so we had plenty of dogs and kids. [laughter] We didn't mind, and we didn't say, "Do this and do that." If they wanted to walk with us, they had to know how. We walked out on the flat, and then we circled around. We didn't circle around the same direction every time, but we did get them out of town in the same direction for the simple reason, walking down the streets here, well, it seemed to me like everyone in every house had a barking dog. [laughter] And I had this German shepherd named Happy, and he didn't like them running up and barking at him. Out there the dogs could run, and the kids could run, and we could just go on about our own walking business and talk. Frances had a little bit of a weight problem. She never did let herself get heavy. I never did have any weight problem, but she watched hers and kept herself trim all of the time.

So was walking part of that? Just to get some exercise?

RG: Yes, it was. It was to get her exercise and mine. I was born and raised on a ranch where everybody worked. You didn't have to take walks there to get your exercise. There were always cows to milk, and the women did that because there were other chores for the boys. [laughter] But housework, it doesn't always give you that much exercise, and watching kids.

When you and Frances were walking, was that time for you to talk to each other, too?

RG: Yes, we were visiting. We walked along talking, ignored the kids. They were having fun of their own. They'd always take somebody along, and the kids would run along, and they would skip and play. They were used to looking out for themselves. There wasn't anything they could get hurt with.

Frances lived right here in back of me. Her house faced the highway, and mine faced this street down here. When they got married, there was a three-room house there that Stan bought. Before they ever moved into it, they rented a house. I think it was four rooms, and he had carpenters already working on their house when they got married. When they moved to Gabbs, he had that house moved up to Gabbs in 1950.

So when Frances moved to Gabbs, how did that work for the store?

RG: Well, I don't remember if we paid her anything. I'm sure we must have—for the supplies and her interest. And then Virginia Humphrey and I ran it. Well, Virginia never liked to work, really. She was a little older than we were. So when Frances got out of it, well, then Virginia wanted out. I still had the post office, so we paid her off, and she didn't work anymore. Harvey had the service station across the street, and he was working for the power company, so Virginia would sell the gas and do things over there while he was on duty. But as soon as he was off duty, then he took over.

So how did you run the store and post office alone, once you lost both of your partners?

RG: Well, there weren't that many people in Silver Peak then. It had died down a lot. And, of course, my hours weren't as long. As the people moved out, they cut my hours down. And so then I just took care of it. This was after the fire happened, which was before 1950.

Then you were in the Black Mammoth building for a while, right?

RG: Yes, we were. Frances was still here when we were in the Black Mammoth.

And then did you eventually sell the store or close the store?

RG: Well, you see, we lost everything that was in the store in the fire, and when we started back up, we just had a small store there. While I was working in the post office, people would just gather up their groceries, and then I would go in there and ring it up on the cash register. They had to wait on themselves. Then it got to where I just did the post office. The mail came out of Tonopah, and if people wanted groceries, Marco Chiatovich would bring out their groceries for them.

I also gave up the bar. One night three men were having a party there, and they just got out of hand. That's when I decided I was going to get out of the bar. They were people that we knew. What got me was that you think you know people . . . I had known those men ever since I had been here. And it was about one o'clock, so I just cut them off [no more alcoholic drinks]. Then they just threw things at me, like the salt shaker. The one fellow, the fighter, Eddie Murphy, was working under my husband, who was up there at the mine. He was the worst. He always thought he was smart. Of course, he was just a fat boxer.

I didn't serve them another drink, and they didn't come behind that bar either. We had a blackjack there. I said, "You come behind that, either one of you, and this is it." Oh, they told me how smart I thought I was and criticized me and called me names.

So you were alone there with these guys throwing things at you?

RG: That's right. But somehow Ernie, who was up at the Mary Mine, heard about it, and he came down to see. And when he did, they got off that mine.

They were fired?

RG: Yes, they were, and they moved away from here, too.

I didn't let them come behind the bar, because I had the blackjack, and I would have used it. They left after two or three hours. I think I got home about four o'clock in the morning. That was it. That was the end of the bar. I said, "No more bar. I won't tend bar anymore." I wasn't scared. I was mad. There's a funny thing about your body—if you figure you're in a little bit of danger, you're not scared. You will stand up for yourself.

Ed Murphy was the worst, and, finally, at the last he was kind of coming to, and he said, "I suppose you're going to tell Mac."

I said, "Yes, he's going to know about it."

But that was natural for Ed if he got drunk. He really tried to take advantage. And to tell you the truth, when he was in the ring, he was a good boxer, but none of the men were afraid of him. As I said, "Oh, yes, when he is in the boxing ring, he's the big shot. But when he isn't, he's no big shot around me." He didn't get by with anything. In fact, others could get by with things that he couldn't, because he *thought* he could get by with it. [laughter] And he had wife problems and girlfriend problems all of the time. He brought it on himself.

Ed Murphy apparently had a bit of a drinking problem. Is that right?

RG: Yes, he did. I think that's the reason he didn't get any farther with his boxing career. He just lost control.

What was the line that he crossed? Because in a mining town there's a fair amount of drinking. People get off work and go to the bar. Is that true?

RG: Well, yes, but most of them just have a few drinks—the majority. And maybe a third drink, and that's the end of it.

There were certain ones that couldn't handle it but not many.

Was there any help for people who got out of control with their drinking? Did they have AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] or anything like that around for people who couldn't handle their booze?

RG: Most of them would go and help themselves. You can't help them. They'd have to go to get help, because if you would mention it, they would deny it.

After Frances moved to Gabbs, which was about 100 miles away, we still visited. Stan and Ernie still had mining equipment, and they were in touch about different claims. She came over quite often, and we made it over there quite often.

Ernie passed away first?

RG: Yes, because Ernie had been in bed some time. And one time when I didn't know they were coming down, she came to the door and told me, "I've got Stan out here in the car. He can't walk by himself. I'm going to bring him in."

He had crutches. And so I said, "Well, I'll come out and help you."

Instead, we looked around, and there he was coming down the . . . He says, "I don't need anybody's help."

When you have that Valley Fever, it just takes your body. Stan's face looked well, but then, even on those crutches and even with our help, we could hardly get him in the door. He was very independent. She told me, "He's just like this at the house all of the time. He wants to go in and out of the house by himself. He falls all over everything." And she was afraid he was going to get hurt.

So he was sick about the same time Ernie was sick?

RG: Yes, he was. Ernie was in bed when Stan came down to see him. Ernie never did get out of bed. Then Frances took Stan over into California to Bakersfield. She was there about a week or ten days. Then they said that up in San Francisco there was a place that could help him. I didn't think she could drive in San Francisco—that traffic is something, but she did. They loaded him up, and the doctor told her what places to stop on the way up there, and to call him, and then he would tell her exactly what street to take to get to this hospital. Why would a doctor send you on something like that when I think it was just two or three days before he was gone? He was near gone. They couldn't help him. Frances told me herself, "You know, I believe those doctors knew that nothing could help him." And so, then he died in San Francisco, and she had him brought back.

And you two stayed in touch during all of that time by phone? That was a tough time for two friends, with both of your husbands sick.

RG: Yes. It was tougher for her. I was right here at home with Ernie. After he got out of the hospital, he said, "I'm never going back. They aren't doing me any good. I'm passed the helping stage."

But with her, she was away from home, away from her kids, worried sick about him, trying to get something done for him. And then, after she got to San Francisco and he died, she said, "I wondered if I could drive to get out of San Francisco. But I just drove. It was all over with. I just felt so calm. I just loaded up the stuff and started out." She did have a map that she drew and named the streets and how to get onto the highway. And she said, "You know, I'll never go back."

Well, she had a mother living down there in San Francisco, but she didn't have anything to do with her.

Because her mother had left her when she was a child, and she stayed with her dad, is that correct?

RG: Well, I guess she was the one that told me originally, but she didn't talk much about it, because she didn't like to talk against her mother. Well, the worst part about it was that her mother had a chance to sell her for \$450, and she sold her to some people down there near San Francisco, where the fellow and his wife did their own work on the farm. I think that she was five years old at the time, because Frank kept calling, trying to find out where she was. He couldn't find out anything, so he said, "I've got enough money to get down to San Francisco and back."

When he found the mother, she told him where she had left Frances, and he went to get her. But the farmer said, "Well, you can't have her unless you come up with \$500." Then he came back to the Peak and borrowed the \$500, and he sent it to the fellow.

I asked, "Frank, how did you know that they would . . . ?"

Frank was kind of tough-talking, and he said, "I sent a check to the bank for them, so they had to sign for it. I had plenty of proof they got it. I gave them a little talking to before I left, so I knew he would put her on the bus." She had to change buses, and they put a tag on her—where she was going. The bus stopped out here at Coaldale Junction [or Blair Junction, three miles north of Silver Peak?] and let her off. They just put that little kid off right out here up at the highway, and she started walking in.

They let her out twenty miles from Silver Peak?

RG: Well, the trucks didn't go all the way to the highway. They just went out to the railroad station [at Blair] with the ore, and she had walked that, which is about a

quarter of a mile. And Frank had told the truckdriver, "If you see a little kid out there, you pick her up."

But when she left San Francisco someone had told her, "If anybody tries to pick you up, don't let them pick you up." [laughter] So they had a problem until he finally talked her into getting in the truck.

Frank kept her from then on. He boarded her out if he was living out on a job. As a matter fact, one woman she lived with for several years off and on. Frank picked her up and kept her in the summertime if he could. Then, when Frank and my sister Betty were married, Frances was living with them.

After her husband, Stan, died, Frances stayed in Gabbs, and you stayed here?

RG: She stayed in Gabbs, because she was the postmaster. She moved to Yerington after she retired.

And you still stayed in touch then, all that time?

RG: All those years, yes, we did.

She just passed away in May, is that right?

RG: What a shame that . . .

GG: Well, she was already in the hospital when we went to see Ruby's sister [Betty] who lives in Yerington and is bed-ridden. We went over to Frances' place to see her, and she wasn't there. And then Betty's husband told us that she [Frances] went to the hospital for an operation and was going home in a day or two. The next thing we heard—that she had passed away about a week later.

That must have been a real shock for you.

RG: Yes. She got out of the hospital and was at Barbara's, and then she got sick, and they didn't make it back to the hospital with her. There's one thing about it—when you go fast, that's all we can wish for. No suffering, just go. That's the best way it can be. I miss her though.

After talking about Frances, I wanted to talk about you and Griff—how the two of you got together. You met at the post office?

GG: Well, I was working for Foote Mineral, and I think somebody from the mill told me that I had mail down at the post office. I didn't figure I had any mail coming, so I didn't go right away. [laughter] That was the first time I met her. Six months or so after the first time I met her, we went on a date together.

Tell me about the first date.

GG: I asked her to go out to dinner. We went over to Hawthorne and tipped a few at the bar before we got to the dinner at the El Cap. [laughter] I guess we got home about two o'clock in the morning or something of the sort, probably. [laughter]

And how long was this romance after you went out to dinner?

GG: It seemed to me it was a month and two weeks after our first date before we went up to Reno and got married in Virginia City.

That was a whirlwind romance. Did you tell people here in town that you were going to get married?

RG: I didn't really announce it, but here in town all your friends, they know exactly who, what . . .

GG: They know your business before you do. [laughter]

So how did your friends celebrate your wedding?

GG: Oh, they had a big party, and they were going to give us a shivaree, but it just ended up being more or less a potluck party here at the house a week or so after we got back. It went on for a quite a while.

And what did they usually do for a shivaree?

RG: Well, they would put the bride in a wheelbarrow, and the man had to push you down the street and up the street and stop at the bars and drink and everything, but they didn't do that with us.

GG: No. Well, it got a little bit late before the party got started, because we weren't here at the house when the neighbors came down. We were both up at the mills. At that time she was cleaning the office for Foote Mineral.

Was anything happening at the Oromonte Mine, which is just over the hill, when you were living with Ernie up at the Mary Mine?

RG: No. There wasn't anything.

GG: She owned half interest in that mine. Well, Gavins (Jimmy and Marie) and you owned half and half. We sold it eventually to that fellow in Colorado.

You owned it with Jimmy, but you didn't ever do any work with that mine?

RG: No.

GG: No, it was patented. You didn't have to do any assessment work or anything

for patented claims. We would always talk about doing things, but nothing ever got done. Jimmy Gavin and Harvey Humphrey hooked up with a whole big area of claims—some of them were Humphrey's, and some of them Humphrey and Gavin owned together. And then the four that Gavin and we owned together, Kirkwood Industries bought those—practically stole them. He paid so much a month on it and eventually paid it off.

When you bought the store, was that the same store that the Smith's brothers started here?

RG: Yes, but we didn't buy that store, we rented it. When I first came to town Gordon and Lindsay Smith had a big business, and that was an immense, big building, because they handled lumber and tools. It was about five buildings there together, just built on. But when the town died down and they moved out of it, that's when we rented it from them. There was a third brother, too. Gordon and Lindsey were the businessmen, and the other one was a spendthrift, the blow-hard.

GG: The other one was considered a little off up here, so the rest of them tried to keep a distance from him. [laughter]

RG: Gordon and Lindsey were quite nice to deal with. They bought the El Cap. They married the two Stark sisters here. They also went into mining, because they had some mining property out of Gabbs or somewhere. My brother, Fred, worked for them. He was one of the bosses up there.

GG: Yes, they had properties around the country in different places. Like they had some down there at the lower end of Death Valley, and that's where they usually tried to keep their brother—out in one of those places. [laughter]

RG: We rented the building. It was completely empty when we rented it. The back part of the building, that had platforms

for lumber. We never did have anything to do with that. We just rented the store part.

ALBERTA MERRITT

ALBERTA MERRITT arrived in Silver Peak with her husband and three small daughters during a violent thunderstorm in July of 1956. Alberta was determined that Silver Peak would be a temporary home for her family. However, forty years later Alberta was still a vital part of the community when, in 1996, we recorded her memories of the changes she had seen at Silver Peak. At first, her husband ran the power station, and Alberta raised their daughters. Later they owned a ranch, and when the girls were old enough to attend school, Alberta returned to teaching. She retired from the Silver Peak school in 1985.



ALBERTA MERRITT: My husband's brother, Dick, was working at the mill in Gabbs, and he was looking for a mill job, perhaps at Silver Peak. Dick asked my husband, Nate, if he would like to ride over with him, and Nate said, "Sure." When Nate got back to Peavine [Peavine Canyon in Big Smokey Valley] where we were living, he said, "Oh, that's the most desolate place. I'd never live there!"



He was one that didn't ever want to be on the labor market. I found in one of his little notebooks, he said, "I'll be on this labor market two years," and then he was going to get into his own business. While we were here, we acquired cattle and the ranch in Fish Lake Valley, so we were ranchers and substation personnel, too.

Lloyd Ellis, my uncle, was a lineman here in Silver Peak for the California Electric Power Company out of Bishop, California. He would come to Peavine and go fishing every Sunday, and we would visit. He

told Nate that there was a job opening here in Silver Peak for a transmission substation operator, and Nate got the job. Well, it wasn't too long after he had said he would never live here that here we were.

We came sometime in the last part of July 1956, during the worst thunderstorm and electrical storm that I've been in. The rain was pouring down, and we had a cattle truck and a pickup with the rack all loaded with our furniture and our beds, and everything that we owned in the world was on those two trucks.

VICTORIA FORD: And did you have children at that time?

Yes, we had the three girls. My youngest, Cheryl, was six months old. And so Leona had to be a year and a half, and Linda had to be four and a half or five, I think.

So three little girls under the age of five and a truck with all your belongings and a cattle truck with cattle on it?

No, they just loaded everything in that, and we unloaded it all in the rain. Every time the lightening would hit a power pole or a power line, there was this big fire bell in our kitchen in this new, little house that we were moving into, and it would ring and just about deafen us, because it was so loud. It was meant to be loud so that no matter where they were, they could hear it and know that they had to run to the substation yard and close the switches. Then everybody would have power.

And how did they do that, close the switches?

They had these long—they must have been ten-foot- or twelve-foot-long sticks with kind of a hook on them. And I think they had to . . . I don't know how the switches would get in contact with one another. I think they

would have to push out and close those switches with these long sticks. But if they were tripped again by another lightening bolt or something was wrong someplace else, then they wouldn't hold, and he would have to call the main office and get troubleshooters and the linemen from other places to go out and fix whatever was wrong. But that was really harrowing, because the lightening was hitting everywhere all around us, and the thunder was terrible, and it was pouring rain, just like a cloudburst hit right in this spot. And then later on in the afternoon, why, everything was calm and peaceful and cool and refreshing.

When you watched him manually handling the switches with this pole, did he wear gloves? Were there any safety measures, or did it look unsafe to you?

He had to wear a hard hat when he went out in the yard—always had to put on a hard hat. And I'm not sure whether they had safety gloves or not. I don't remember that. But I know it was a long way, and that long pole was wobbly, and they had to find just that right spot. They had to give it a mighty push to close it, or it wouldn't close. Things were all enclosed in the high fence. And our family could go into the substation but not go behind the counter, because they had their radios and shortwaves and all of their switches, controls . . . I don't really know how they operated, but no one was allowed to go behind this big counter they had.

We could visit. My girls and I could go over there. They weren't supposed to go there alone. Cheryl, my youngest, she learned to walk in that little house around Christmas time, I guess, and she always ran away over there. We'd lock the gates and not let her out, but somehow she'd get out, and Daddy would bring her back, and she'd be squealing, "No. No. No. I don't want to go home!" And Daddy called her his little "No-no." [laughter] He worked there from 1956

until maybe 1973 or 1974, nearly twenty years.

Did the company change quite a bit during that time?

Yes. California Electric sold out to California Edison, I believe. And then California Edison sold it to Sierra Pacific Power. But I think it's just those three power companies that were in there. (I may have some of those names wrong, but that's what I recall.) And then they updated their communication system. The only telephone in town was there at the substation at that time in 1956. People would have to go down and use the substation telephone, because no one else had any telephones.

So community people were allowed to use the phone? For emergencies only or just . . . ?

Well, I think if they really had to, they could, if there wasn't an emergency happening at that time for the electric company.

Most everyone had oil stoves, but we had an electric kitchen stove for cooking. We didn't have any streetlights, and everybody had their own little water system. We had running water, but no drinking water. The water table here was quite high, and it wasn't really fit. It tasted terrible—smelled worse, you know. And Saturday was the water day, because everyone got their water from the big spring up there about ten or twelve miles away. And if Nate was on duty, he'd go around with the power company truck and gather everybody's containers, gallon jugs and barrels, for us and for some of the older people who maybe couldn't get it. He always got water for me for the school, because I had to fill up this ten-gallon barrel of water.

When Nate went, then we all went and climbed the hills and splashed in the water

and washed the What was the little pond that was there? And, oh, pick watercress and bring it home and have watercress sandwiches. It was fun.

It was an outing then for the family. The first house that you lived in, will you name off all the rooms that it had?

It had a little porch, just a little porch as long as the kitchen. I imagine the kitchen might have been ten by twelve, something like that. There was always a front door and a back door opposite of each other, so it always created a nice breeze, because it does get hot here in the summertime. Then there was the kitchen, and right off that was supposedly a living room. Because we had three children, we turned that living room into a living and a bedroom for my husband and myself. And in the other room beside it, we had a set of bunk beds and a single bed for the three girls. When Cheryl was just a baby yet, there was a closet. It didn't have any doors on it, and her crib just fit in this closet. So that's where we put her crib, and that's where she slept. Well, when they got older they had the bunk beds. And then right off of that bedroom was a little bath and a closet, and that was it.

One closet in the whole house. The other closet was being used for the baby's basket. So you were in a three room house with three small children? And your bedroom was also the living room. Was the dining room part of the kitchen?

It was part of the kitchen. We had a kitchen table moved all the way to the kitchen.

OK. Did you raise your own food? Did you have a garden, or did you travel to get food?

We didn't have a garden here. We would always have to travel to buy groceries. We

would usually go to Hawthorne, because at that time the Big T Market was there, and you could buy groceries real reasonably. We felt that Tonopah prices were really quite high. We would buy cases of canned goods. Our grocery bill might be like \$125, but the whole floor of our pickup would be full of cases of goods and sacks, and that would usually last us for about a month. I would bake bread and make jam, and if we had any food, or if I could find any food, I would always can it.

It wasn't long after we got here that Nate got milk cows, so we always had our fresh milk and cream and butter and cottage cheese. Everyone that had a garden always had more than they could use, so they would be happy to get rid of it, and we were happy to get it. We were both raised on ranches and farms, so we knew what to do with these things.

My mom and dad had a ranch. They homesteaded in Dixie Valley in the early 1920s, and we raised everything we needed. Mom might sneak in a pound of coffee and maybe a pound of sugar, but my dad didn't use either one, so he didn't think it was really necessary. [laughter] But he didn't mind. We had bees, so we had our honey, which was all that we needed. And we would buy flour, and wheat for the chickens, and oats and wheat for the horses, but everything else we raised.

So then Nate was running the power station and, eventually, ranching or operating some land?

Yes, we bought the old Chiatovich ranch in Fish Lake Valley. It was just a big pasture, and we had the grandfather rights to the water from Fish Lake itself. We had 64,000 acres under the . . . not grazing, but there's another name for the winter range where we finally got enough.

To get started he bought milk cows. Eventually, we had five milk cows. And we

had one little old Guernsey cow that they could put five calves on because her bag was enormous. That's a good milker! And we called her June. She was so good natured. She didn't care how many calves were on her. That was the start of our herd—June and her calves. Then we would go to Yerington or wherever anybody had calves to sell and bring them home. I remember one time when he went to Yerington, and he took out the back seat of the car, and here he brought three little calves home in the back seat of the car. [laughter] Then, whenever the cattle became pregnant, we'd have those extra calves also.

We had cats, of course, and all sorts of animals. It was our kids' job to milk a little coffee can of milk for those cats. That's all they had to do was just feed the cats, so the kids had to learn to milk, and June didn't care. One would be on one side and the other kid on the other side, and they'd milk.

You didn't have to worry about her kicking them or anything?

Unless they pinched her, then she flicked her tail and maybe moved her foot.

It was just a happy, happy time. Nate and I had always been out in the hills, in the desert and isolated, and I didn't mind it. In fact, this is downtown for me—living here in Silver Peak.

Being so close to the rest of the 150 people here in town. Did you start teaching school right away when you came to Silver Peak?

No. Well, I didn't really want to, and my husband wouldn't allow me to work until this family was up and ready to go to school. And we always felt they were our children—it was our obligation to raise them and take care of them and not have a babysitter. They never had a babysitter, and they really griped about that as they got older. "We

never had a babysitter! Why didn't you get us a babysitter, and you and Daddy go off?"

Dad would say, "Well, if you can't go with us, we're not going."

But anyway, I think I started subbing [substitute teaching] around the county here in 1961.

And, in fact, in 1956-1957 you said this school closed. Why?

There weren't enough children to hold it open. See, at that time Mike (my uncle's little boy's name was Mike) had gone to first grade in Goldfield the year before, so he was in second grade, and Linda was in first grade in 1957. So the girls and I all moved to Goldfield. And then I kept Mike, my little cousin. He lived with us so Mike and Linda could go to school, and that's when Anne Tomany was their teacher. When I started teaching, she was the county coordinator, and she helped me get going.

So she was the teacher for your oldest daughter in Goldfield?

The elementary . . . the primary teacher.

And you lived there during the winter, during the school months, and then came back to Silver Peak during the summer? OK. And then your husband stayed here and took care of the power station?

And we would come home during the weekends usually.

What did you use for transportation back and forth to Goldfield?

I drove. Well, it seemed to me we always had a pickup or a truck. I don't think we had a car when we went to Goldfield. But then Nate would come over and bring us home, or bring us something that we needed. But as time went on, we got a car, and he always

had his pickup, so then we had two ways to go back and forth.

By 1961 then, you started teaching. What was your training for teaching?

Well, I went to UNR [University of Nevada, Reno].

Right after high school?

Yes, but I have to tell you, I was two years younger than everybody else. My sister started school in Dixie Valley where we were raised. She was six and I was four, and I wanted to go to school. Well, it's about two miles to the schoolhouse from my folks' place. When my sister left, I didn't want to be there by myself, so I followed on the road, and I went to school. And my mother thought I was lost, because my sister had been lost overnight when she was about two, out in the desert. It was just bushes where they were homesteading. My sister had wandered off, and she had gone to sleep under a bush. They finally found her, but my mom thought the same thing had happened to me, and she was all worried to death.

She followed my tracks in the dust to the schoolhouse and brought me home. But she switched my legs with a tamarack switch all the way home, because she was so scared, saying, "You can't go to school with Nevada." Nevada is my sister's name. Nevada went the next day, and after she was gone and Mom got busy, I went again. So Mom knew where to look for me then. I think I must have done that about three days in a row.

The third day, my mom came to the school, and the teacher said, "Well, if she wants to come that bad, let her stay."

I was four. And my mother said, "Well, now if she stays, you make her do everything just like the other kids. Don't allow her to do anything that's not right."

So I started school when I was four. When I got out of eighth grade, I was twelve instead of thirteen. And when I went to high school, my sister and I had to board out to work our way through school—stay at someone's home and help with the work, be the babysitter, do whatever they wanted us to do for board and room to stay there while going to high school.

And where was that?

In Fallon.

So who did you board with?

Well, we stayed with my grandmother first until we found a place. And then I stayed with Well, the one that I remember most was the John Hanifan family. I stayed at several places, but I didn't last long because, I think, just that extra in the house when they had several anyway, it was just more of a hindrance than anything else. But John Hanifan He was the county treasurer or something in the courthouse, possibly an elected official. And then the last year I stayed with Jim and Vera Moore. He was an insurance salesman, and they had two little boys.

And when did you graduate then from high school?

I started in 1942.

You went during the war years then?

Yes. I must have graduated in 1946. But in 1943 my mother had her last little boy. She really had two families, because my sister and I were two years apart, and then eight years later she had a little boy, my brother David. And then five years after that she had another little boy, Hugh. My sophomore year of high school, I had just gotten into the principal's office to get my

locker key, and they called me back and said they wanted me to go home and take care of my mother and the babies. My mother had milk leg, and she couldn't walk and get up and take care of everything. So I went back home to Dixie Valley for that semester.

So you were delayed a semester. What is milk leg?

Milk leg is like phlebitis or thrombosis or something like that. But she had to stay off of it, so it was up to me to take care of David and the baby and do the cooking and whatever chores that had to be done. But by the time the spring semester started, then I went back. I graduated the same—I didn't have to go another semester. I just kept on going.

You were right with your grade level anyway. OK. I want to stop just a minute and make sure I get your parents' names. You said they homesteaded in Dixie Valley.

Leon and Mary Ellis.

And your birth date?

My birth date is July 24, 1929. I was born in Fallon, in Churchill County.

OK, so when you graduated from high school, which would have been 1946, did you go directly to the university in Reno? Was that a four-year program or a two-year normal school?

It's a funny story. My folks borrowed a thousand dollars from a friend so I could go to college. I did go one full year of college, and I went the next summer, both sessions. By that time I had enough credits to get a temporary teacher's certificate, so I applied for one, and I got one. I think I had sixty-two credits, and at that time they had a life certificate that they offered. If you taught so

many years, then you could have a life certificate and would never have to go back for

To finish up, because you didn't actually graduate even though you had enough credits? Is that how that works?

I think so. I'm not really sure how it was. I think that you still had to go back every so many years, and that's what I did. I kept my certificate up-to-date. Then I had my first offer of a school at Fairview out of Fallon. It was a mining community. It was in the Broken Hills Mining District, and the manager of the mine was on the school board. I had to catch the mail stage. My dad took me to the highway from our ranch, which was about thirty-five miles, where I would meet Mr. Stark, who was the mailman. Then he would take me into Broken Hills to the mine. Well, the mine manager saw me walking and saw how young I was. I had gone to a friend's house, a former teacher who had taught in Dixie Valley. Her name was Frances Aylers. He called her up and said that I couldn't have the job. Oh, so she took me back to Fallon where I was staying with my aunt and my Uncle Lloyd. When five o'clock came, I called up that gentleman and really gave him what for! I was so mad! I was so mad that I couldn't get that job. And I told him, "Well, I can take care of those kids!"

He said, "Some of them are bigger than you are!"

And I said, "I don't really care. I can teach them."

He said, "No, it would be better if you didn't come."

Because he felt you were too young, too small?

And too inexperienced. After I told him off, later I thought, "Geez." [laughter]

Maybe that wasn't such a good idea?

Maybe not, because he's been around Fallon, and I was just really a nobody as yet. I didn't know that at the time. [laughter] Then I subbed for a teacher whose husband was overseas. He was having R & R in Hawaii, and they needed a teacher to teach for the two weeks while she was gone. Well, the young teacher had the lower grades, but her mother taught the upper grades. This was at the Harmon School in Fallon. So I started there, and I taught for two weeks.

After the Harmon District, I taught at Lone Tree School District where they had a two-room school. It's out south of Fallon, going towards Schurz and Hawthorne. They had a one-teacher school that needed to have two teachers, because they were getting too many students in all of these grades. They needed a teacher for the primary grades at Lone Tree School, so I finished out the year there, and my room was what used to be the teacherage.

The teacherage? Which is what?

The place where the school would provide a place for the teachers to live. But it was connected to the upper-grade room. This is where Theo Wightman came in, because she had been their teacher, but she just would teach off and on, and she had stopped teaching. She was another one of my mentors, Theo Wightman, and she was such a lovely, lovely lady.

When you say she was your mentor, what did she do?

She just told me how to teach first grade. They try in school, but you don't learn until you are actually out there with the kids. She was just telling me all the family words that make new words—"at" and "ad" and "ill" and "ed." I just loved the lower grades. Those darling little first-grade girls and boys

were so cute and so willing. And this one little girl, she was darling. She pulled up her little dress [whispers], "I got ruffles on my panties." [laughter]

In the meantime, all the little school districts in Fallon . . . Sheckler District and Harmon District and all of those had a school within their district. In 1947, I believe, the Churchill County school board decided that they would consolidate the schools, and all the kids from all these districts would go to the schools in town.

So you taught for a while, and then how did you meet Nate?

Well, his folks had a ranch. I had my eye on him since I was probably about four years old. Maybe that's why I went to school, because he was there. I told myself then I was going to marry him, and I did. His folks had a ranch, and we had a ranch.

Side by side?

Well, kind of. A few miles away. But my folks had the range on the west side of the valley, and his folks had the cattle range on the other side of the valley.

I see. And so what was he doing? Was he older than you?

He was seven years older than I was. But he was in school when I started. He gave me a little white puppy. "Billy Dog," we called him.

His folks would be there in the valley during some part of the year, and then they'd go to Fallon, because I think they had a ranch . . . farmland in Fallon, so they would be there off and on. And then Nate worked at the Summit King Mine when they didn't have to do anything with the cows. Then he went to war. [World War II] During the war he was gone, and I was in high school by then.

What did he serve in? In the army?

In the armed forces, yes, and he ended up as a corporal in the medic branch of the service.

And then you went on to college, and he came back from the war?

Well, yes. He came back in 1945. We had dances at the schoolhouse, and he'd dance with the cook's or the boss's sister, and I'd just sit there. I really felt sad, but I was just a little kid yet, while she was [a] young lady and he was a young man. Oh, I felt awful.

But then when I got out of high school, we were kind of going together. We weren't married. I wanted to go to college, and he didn't want me to go, because he was afraid I would meet somebody else up there. He proposed when I came home, and I accepted right away. We were engaged when I taught there [Lone Tree], and then they needed a teacher in Dixie Valley, so I taught there two years. We didn't have any children at that time.

It was there that I had my two brothers as students, and I had Nate's brother. Nate's brother was in the eighth grade, and he didn't like school. I couldn't teach him anything. The only way I got him to learn board feet, I said, "Now, when you go out with Nate and you go get a load of lumber, you darn well better know how many board feet you have, because if you don't and they do, you're going to get gypped." Well, then he learned about board feet, because he wanted to be out with Nate all the time.

Did you stop teaching when you had your children? And then started again after you got to Silver Peak and the children were old enough to be going to school with you?

Yes, right.

In 1961, here in Silver Peak, did you start teaching all grades?

Yes, all grades.

And how many children did you teach that first year?

Probably twelve or thirteen. There were not very many, but there was one in every grade. You couldn't have one grade missing. It would have been nice at that time, but we had one in every grade. [laughter]

And prior to that, you had only taught certain grades, is that correct?

Yes, but my education was for all grades, kindergarten through twelve.

Were you glad to get back to teaching?

Yes, I was, because I loved it so. It was so much fun to go decorate my room and get all these neat things to talk about and have for the kids to look at and write about. I just had fun with the kids.

Was it different in Silver Peak than where you had been teaching before?

Well, before I only had the primary grades. Now I had eight grades. But then I remembered how my teacher had done it in Dixie when I was going to school with all the grades together.

How to deal with all those kids?

Yes. Absolutely. And that's what I relied on, because I could remember how she did it. Everybody went to the chalkboard to do a math problem, but she didn't give everybody the same problem. Everybody had a different problem. And I thought, "Well, pretty clever."

And at that point, you were living still in a three-room house and teaching at what has now become the Vinegaroon Saloon, which is a small, wooden house here. Were there still three buildings or just that one building?

There was that building and a teacherage. When the Mohawk Mine opened in the 1960s, and suddenly we had thirty-one [students], more or less, in all eight grades.

And you got some help then?

Yes, Lydia Baird from Goldfield. She was finishing teacher's college in Kansas, and she had to wait until she could take the state school law exam and the state constitution exam before she could get her teaching certificate. She had her degree, but she had to do those things before she could get a Nevada certificate, but they only gave those tests twice a year, so you had to wait. She came and took the upper grades, and then I had the first four grades. She stayed at the teacherage.

OK. What Alberta is showing me is a scenic shot, a color photo that was taken about five years ago, which shows the old schoolhouse that is now the Vinegaroon Saloon. And right next to it is the small . . . it looks like a stone or concrete building.

It's just a building with brown brick siding on it.

Tell me what happened as the school years passed. Did this pattern continue where sometimes you'd have twelve, sometimes you'd suddenly have thirty? Or did it stay fairly stable from then on in terms of the number of children?

No. Whenever the mines closed down, then our population went down, but we always maintained enough Well, by

that time Foote Mineral Company had come in. I think they started in 1961. When they started, then the families started coming in from Big Bear, and a lot of them from that area were from another job, I guess, because a lot of them who came here knew each other. That kept our school population up, and we could maintain a two-teacher school. If we had more, then maybe we might have an aide to help us. But sometimes if we didn't have an aide, I would take some of the upper-grade students that were finished with their work and wanted to come into my room (they loved to come into my room), and I would have them listen to somebody read or have them watch somebody do something, you know, just to help me out and help the students out, too. But when you have all four grades in the lower grades, somebody is getting neglected. And I hated to have that happen, but it just happens.

You can't be with every child every minute.

No.

So having those older students come in helped give more children more attention?

Everybody. They had free time. They were through with all of their things, so it worked out really well.

I had all three of my girls in that classroom. But in Dixie Valley when I had my two brothers and my brother-in-law, at four o'clock every night I sat down and cried, because I just could not . . . the pressure of family . . . See, they wanted to call me Sis, and I wouldn't let them, and that made them upset. And if I got after my little brother in the first grade, my brother in the fifth grade would be all put-out for days because I scolded him or something.

So teaching in Silver Peak, even though it was your own children, was still easier

than teaching your brothers and your brother-in-law back in Dixie Valley?

Well, I don't know. My youngest daughter had two years with another teacher before I started . . . or maybe three years. But anyway, when she was in third grade, I tried so hard, and she was trying so hard, but it was just heartbreaking for both of us. We couldn't communicate, especially with math. But I understood how she felt, because I always had trouble with math when I was going to school. I'd ask the teacher, "Is this what you are saying?"

And she would say, "No." But if I did what I was saying, I would get the answer, and it would be correct even though we didn't talk the same language. So I understood how Cheryl was, because we didn't talk the same language, and it was hard. That's when I told Lydia, "Next year Cheryl will be in the fourth grade. I will take your fifth grade if you will take the fourth grade."

So that your daughter would have another teacher?

Yes. By that time Leona and Linda were in her room anyway, my other two girls, and it worked out really great. And my Cheryl, she thinks that Mrs. Bridgeman [Lydia's married name] is the greatest thing that there ever was, and she still does.

So there are occasionally problems in teaching your own children or your relatives?

Yes. They wanted to be familiar, and I couldn't allow it, because it would show favoritism, and I did not want that. I didn't want any other kids saying, "They're teacher's pet." You know how that goes. So I had to be really harder on them than I ordinarily would be on anyone else. Well, it was a challenge.

When did you become the principal of this school?

Oh, I guess I always was, but we didn't ever have any title. They called it lead teacher when I first started there. It was up to me to sweep and mop the floors, get the water, order the supplies—do everything, because we didn't have a maintenance person or a janitor or anything like that.

Did kids bring their lunches?

Some did.

Some went home?

Yes.

*Were you also in charge of the recreation?
You had recess duty?*

Oh, all the time, yes. We did a lot. We played softball and kick-the-can or whatever they wanted to play, but we had fun. And I liked to get out. If it snowed, which was rare here, we'd stay out and play in the snow until it melted, and then we went in and did our work. We made angels and snow forts and snowmen, and had snowball fights—all the things that you could do with snow.

Were there any particular things that you noticed with the children being from mining families that might be different from other communities?

No, I really didn't notice any difference. The children were respectful. They were not troublesome. That wasn't until the later years, in the late 1970s, when the whole school system was changing, and the children were running the classrooms, and the teachers did not have control. That was back when you couldn't have corporal

punishment, not that I would beat one of them or anything like that.

One of the things that I wanted to let you talk about more was discipline in the schools, especially when you're the only teacher for a while. Discipline was really entirely up to you for all of the grades. I'd like to have you just talk to me a little bit about what methods you used, what methods you believed in—how that all evolved. Any particular examples of discipline that came up?

Well, it seemed like at first there wasn't much discipline to be done in 1961. I had all eight grades, and it just seemed like things went along. I know there was one seventh grade boy, he was tall . . .

Taller than you?

Yes, and I got so disgusted with him, because he could do the work, but he wouldn't do it. He thought he couldn't. He either sassed me or made some flip comment, and I took his desk with him in it, and I just shook him all around that room. I was so upset. Well, that's all it took, and then I didn't have any more problems. [laughter]

But you didn't touch him, you just shook the desk all around the room?

No, I just took the desk, and it moved. Then I would talk to them and tell them, "I am so upset with you, because you do have the capabilities, and you mustn't ever think you can't." And I just would try to build them up. I'm sure they were embarrassed, but I didn't care. Then it seemed like we were on better footing. But they didn't really know what I would do, you see. I always figured if you got the Indian sign on, why, they're not going to push you. Indian sign means they are leery—they are not going to push you, because they don't know what

might happen. Not that I would do anything, but they didn't know that, so that was a good way.

I hated it so much when I had to have discipline problems. Also, because I was lead teacher, I had book work. I couldn't start teaching in my class until about ten o'clock in the morning sometimes. That would just break my heart, because they would all be busy, but I wasn't there listening to them and finding out what they did know and what they didn't know. That was my job, and that's what I really wanted to do.

Were there any other examples of disruptions in the classroom? It sounds like part of what you used was just real subtle . . . that they wouldn't know what you would do?

Yes, that's true. That really was my main weapon. If a child was misbehaving or annoying someone else, disturbing someone else, I would go whisper in their ear and ask them not to—that they needed to get their work finished. It was not right for them to disturb anyone else. And, of course, they would all want to know what I said. Then I would go whisper in their ear, "If I wanted you to know, I would have said it out loud." So I just kept them guessing. Or if somebody asked, I just pretended I didn't hear them.

Sometimes if they were goofing around, you know, flipping their erasers and peeling it off or poking at somebody else, why, I would walk up. They wouldn't even see me coming. I used a yardstick a lot to point on the chalkboard, because the rooms were large, and for some of those kids it was hard for them to see. I would slam it on their desk or on the side of their desk, make a big bang, and they would jump up. I'd get their attention for sure, and I wouldn't have to say anything. If everybody else was busy, they would look around and say, "What happened? What happened?" And I would

pretend I didn't even hear. We just went on. But that's all I had to do to get them back to what they were supposed to be doing rather than messing around.

And I was letting them know it could have been worse. I would slap a yardstick down on their desk, and sometimes it would break, and I would just say, "Too bad your hand wasn't there." Especially, if they were really being obnoxious or bothersome to anyone else, because I would not allow them to interfere with anyone else who was trying to learn. Then they are just being a nuisance besides not learning anything for themselves. And I wouldn't allow it. So I didn't spank them, but I'd slap that yardstick on their desk and roll it along the sides, and they would be looking around. Then everything changed. "Too bad your hand wasn't there." Well, I would never have done that.

You would have never done that?

No, but they didn't know that. They thought I might.

Sometimes that's all it took—for them to know that you were upset, and that brought them back into line?

Right. Right, because we got along really well. And I loved going to school. I just loved it. Even when I started to school at four [years old], I wanted to be a teacher.

Some teachers get put off by the discipline. They like to teach, but they don't like that part of it. It doesn't sound like that ever got in your way.

No, it didn't scare me off at all, because it seemed like everything would work out no matter what I did. And it may not have set right with the parents, and they would come in, but before they left we were in agreement and perfectly calm and contented and

satisfied with whatever was happening in the school.

But towards the last year or maybe two years before I retired, my methods must have been outdated, because they didn't work anymore. The parents were really concerned about their children, but they wanted to be able to discipline them from home, which I could see—that they should teach their children at home how to behave someplace else, out in the public or in the school. But it was very hard for me. It seemed like the only thing I could do was talk to them or call their parents. That would take from my time, and I didn't like that. I couldn't seem to get through to the children that, "You can't behave like this in the classroom." My biggest thing was, "You cannot be allowed to disturb others. Now, there are some here that are really trying, and this confusion and noise, it bothers them, so they are not getting a fair treatment. And you don't have the right to do that."

How long were you at the Silver Peak school?

Twenty-four years. I retired in 1985.

And so, it was in the 1970s that things started to change?

Yes. It really did. As we kept getting closer to the 1980s, it was just getting worse. And the parents, they supported the school. They really did. But some of them would come Especially, if I got after their child in school and the child went home and didn't tell the whole story but told his side of it, you know. And then the parent would come storming into my room just really raising a lot of noise and yelling. I would just sit and listen until he was through saying whatever he had on his (or her) mind, and I would say, "Well, this is true, but this is why this is true." And I would explain my

philosophy of it, and when they left, we were good friends, and I didn't have any more trouble with the child. But I would tell them, "I will take care of your child at school. You just take care of them at home. And I won't believe half of anything that they tell me that happened at home, if you won't believe half of anything they think happened at school. And we'll get along fine." And we did, and it worked fine.

But then it came to where the parents would take care of the discipline [for misbehavior in school]; that's what they wanted to do. But I didn't believe in it, because you have to take care of it *now*, not "wait until Dad gets home," because I think it loses its effectiveness, and then the teacher loses her control. You don't have to have absolute control. It's just getting along.

The whole issue of discipline was the kind of thing that reminded you that you were working in a small community, because everybody is close neighbors, close friends. You all know each other, work together. So whatever happened, you had to come to some sort of agreement and friendship at the end of it. That was important?

I don't think I ever had an absolutely quiet classroom, but it wasn't noisy confusion either. Every minute of the day I was working with one child or a group of children. There was always someone reading to me or reading me their assignment: I didn't read it for them. I said, "Now, read this to me, and then tell me what you're supposed to do," so I would know that he knew what he was supposed to do. And recitations—all the grades read aloud, every day. Well, I couldn't when I had eight grades. Then I had first and second read always, every day. But I'd have maybe third and fourth one day, fifth and sixth the next day. Or they would read, maybe not in their reading books, but everybody read something aloud every day, whether it was their

science for seventh and eighth or health for eighth.

I felt that if you don't have them read, you don't know if they're doing it right and getting the words right. And if they don't get the words right, they are not learning right. A wrong word will give them the wrong idea of what they're supposed to be learning, so reading was one of my big things—reading and phonics. I was really a stickler on phonics, too. But as time went on, I found out that some children Especially, I had two little girls. Oh, they were natural readers. They could read all the first-grade books in kindergarten. (I gave everybody the same books, especially when they got into first grade.) But that phonics just threw them a loop. So I thought, "They don't need that, so I'm not going to give it to them, because it just bothered them." A lot of kids, they needed the phonics to connect it to the reading.

But those two little girls, it was amazing. They would sit there and write page after page after page of stories on those big-lined, first-grade papers. And when they finished their work, that's what they would do. They would ask if they could put their desks together, and I said, "Sure, but you have to be quiet." And they would just write these little darling stories. And that gives me goose bumps even now, because I was so proud to be with someone like that. It took such talent.

I really loved to go to school. I couldn't wait. I was as bad as the kids—I couldn't wait for school to start in the summertime.

How many were the most students that you ever had?

I would think probably thirty-one to thirty-five. But I've always had, even in the four grades, anywhere from twenty to twenty-eight or something like that.

What was the least? Was there any year when the mining operations were at low ebb here and you had very few children, in that twenty-five years?

No, because by then we had the two teachers. I might have had eight or ten at the lowest, and that was the hardest time to teach. It was so hard to have so few, because we couldn't do things. It seemed like it was hard. I really can't understand it, but it seemed like I was glad when the day was over. I was probably bored. Usually, we did a lot of fun things. We had aquariums and hamsters, and if they wanted to bring a frog or lizard or a snake, why, we'd have them.

Obviously, frogs and lizards and snakes live around here. But where did you get the other things, the aquariums and so on?

Well, whenever I went to Bishop or during summer school. I had to go quite a lot to keep my credits up, so I went to the teacher's store. I would get so many neat ideas to bring home from the college, and when I was going to summer school, I would go to all of these different departments to see what they were doing.

So that's where you restocked with new information, new ideas, new materials and so on?

Yes, and I bought a lot of things on my own. My storeroom back here When I retired I brought everything home, and there's just boxes and boxes of materials of everything that I have done—science projects and language, arts and crafts, and everything.

Including some of the children's projects or just the teaching materials?

No. The teaching materials, because whenever the students finished something, they needed to take that home.

One year we decided to have a newspaper. This is when we had all eight grades. And I said, "Now, we're going to have a newspaper. You have to think of a name for this newspaper. We're going to sell it for ten cents apiece. And with the money that we've collected, then we're going to order from the Tandy catalog, and then you can all pick out something that you want to make for your moms for Christmas."

One little girl, she called it, "The Peek of the Week," with eyelashes on the 'ee's. Everybody had to write an article.

How was it published?

We divided our classrooms—some to be editors, some to critique it. We gave everyone a job that would be at a newspaper. Spelling and grammar and complete sentences—I used it like a language assignment. Then I would type it up, but I would not use my ribbon. I would just type it on carbon for one of these mimeograph machines. I would type it on mimeograph paper that was purple on one side, and then it had this fluid, and I would run it through with a crank, and then it would print off.

The predecessor to the Xerox machine?

Yes, but this is a funny story, too. We did it for quite a while. And right after school the kids would take their papers, and they would be sold in no time. Everybody bought a paper. While we were doing their Halloween issue in October, I typed it all out. And one of the kids was describing our classroom, you know, horns-of-plenty and witches and goblins and ghosts and pumpkins. Only when I typed horns, I put h-o-r-s. I forgot the "n". [laughter] Whoops! Everybody told me about it. But I couldn't see it, because when you type with

no ribbon, you just get the imprint. When I went to the post office, they all laughed.

Ruby Griffin was at the post office?

Yes. But that was the only mistake I think I really made. [laughter]

But that was one of the fun projects you used to teach language skills.

And they loved it. I had a Tandy leather catalog. Because I had done leather work before, I had some of the stamps and some of the tools. So they ordered these little kits. One got a purse, and one got coasters, and one got ponytail holders, and they made their Christmas gifts for their moms.

Out of that and out of the money that they raised, so it really taught more than language skills. It also taught math and ordering from a catalog. Catalogs must have been an important way of getting items into this community.

It was the only way.

So tell me, what kind of catalogs did you have around your house, for example?

Spiegel's and Aldens and Montgomery Ward's and Sears. And I don't know if we had a Penney's catalog, because when we first came here, Spiegel's catalog had the cheapest clothes. Just before school started, I'd outfit my three girls from the Spiegel's catalog. But then about ten years later, the prices skyrocketed, and a six-dollar dress would be probably sixty-six. The price of children's clothes just went out of sight. You couldn't buy a pair of shoes for three or four dollars like you used to, because the same size shoe would be twenty or thirty dollars. Well, by that time my kids were out of grammar school. When they went to high school, I ordered some things, but probably

from Sears or Ward's. I liked Sears because their quality was better than Ward's. And then there was a little dress shop, Fidel's in Hawthorne, where I bought my kids' clothes when they started in high school. They were nice, nice clothes. They always said, "Those Merritt girls, they look like they just stepped out of a bandbox." They did. They looked pretty.

And when you ordered from the catalog, were things shipped directly to Silver Peak?

To the post office. Sometimes I shopped in Tonopah but not very often. For the school, I always had to make our orders out for books and supplies. We always did that right during Christmas vacation.

For the following year?

Yes, because all around us they'd never get their books until two or three weeks after school started. And how can you start school with nothing to work with? I always had all my lists made and sent into the office, so that we started getting all of these wonderful boxes about May. It was just like Christmas all over again, because I would order so many neat things.

Would you know at Christmas what next year's enrollment was going to be?

Not really, but I always ordered at least three more. Sometimes the other two schools would have the same materials and books that we were using. When the county decided the whole county would have this series, then we could just call over and say, "We need this." It came on the bus.

And the other two schools in Esmeralda County would have been Goldfield and Dyer?

And Dyer is Fish Lake now. Yes, there were only the three schools. There were some children on Lida Ranch, out in Lida, and they had a bus, I think, that came into Goldfield. When they got into high school, they'd drive in and catch the high-school bus. The kids in high school here, they had a bus from here to the junction.

Junction to Highway 95, which is by way of Highway 265 going north out of Silver Peak. And they would go from there to Tonopah? So it was like an exchange point where the high school kids went on to Tonopah, and the elementary kids came here?

Yes. There was always transportation for the children to go somewhere to school.

Did you have school plays and Christmas plays and things for the families and the parents, where the parents would be invited, like an open house at the beginning of the year?

Yes. Exactly. We had back-to-school night. We always had open house after we had something to show them. And then we would always have Halloween parties and birthday parties and a Valentine's Day party. We always observed the holidays. At Christmastime we'd always put on a big production, and everybody had something to say, or maybe two or three things to say. We had plays, and I liked to do shadow plays behind a big sheet.

With the light in back putting the shadows out toward the audience?

Yes. Then Lydia and I, we had more fun doing those Christmas programs. We had three snowmen, and I had taken three big wire hoops. We had three big rolls of cotton, and I sewed all this cotton on this sheet and made these three big snowmen. But the

thing was, it was kind narrow at the feet, and one of the snowmen fell down. It was my nephew, and we couldn't get him up. He couldn't get his feet apart, because the ball had to come around his ankles and legs.



At that time, the *Grade Teacher* and the *Instructor* were the two teacher's magazines that were available, and I always subscribed to those. I ordered them; the school paid for them. But we always got a lot of neat material in them. Then, when we had a new superintendent, anything that was in the store room that was two years old, he took out to the dump. My aide (well, she was the kindergarten teacher at that time) drove the bus to the junction, and she had to do this when the superintendent said, "Now, get rid of all of that stuff."

So she called me up here at home and said, "Mr. So-and-so, he took all those *Instructor* magazines out to the dump."

And I said, "Well, let's go get them." So we did. [laughter]

This was after you had retired, or this was while you were still in school?

I was still in school. He didn't like me saving things, but I save everything. I kept all those *Instructor* magazines, and I especially kept all the holiday ones, because they had such neat ideas. Then, the *Instructor* got smaller and not nearly as informative. Before, they always had something on health and science and nature and plays and poems and songs. After the *Grade Teacher*, they had a magazine for the primary grades called *The Early Years*. Now, it had a few good things, but nothing was ever like those two magazines. And so I gathered up the *Instructor*, and I still have them in my den.

You mentioned health. Now there are school nurses and school counselors in some of the bigger schools. How were

issues about health problems for kids handled? Did you have kids getting the flu and going home sick?

Usually, if they were really sick and no one was home, I think we had a cot. I'd just kind of isolate them and make sure they were warm. I couldn't give them any aspirin or any medication unless I had written permission. If they had chicken pox or whatever, then they didn't come to school. But by that time, everybody else was exposed. I had the measles three times, but I never had anything else. I never had chicken pox. I never had the mumps, and I've been around that. My kids had them, but I didn't get it.

What about accidents? Did you have broken arms or any of those types of things that you had to deal with?

No. No. The only thing that I had to deal with was when we got the merry-go-round. I had it taken out, finally. I didn't want a merry-go-round, but the school board decided the children should have a merry-go-round. I said, "I don't want a merry-go-round. They're dangerous." Anyway, this girl was standing up in the middle (and this was against the rules), and there were all these kids around. She was fifth grade, sixth grade maybe. Nobody knows when they're going to start to push, and she wasn't prepared, so she fell off and broke one of her front teeth off. We rushed her into the . . . by that time we had a lunch room, and put ice on it.

And I told the kids, "We have to find that tooth." And I said, "It's going to just look like this little rock here. It will be covered with dirt. It won't be white." And we searched, and we found that tooth. Then we stuck it in milk, and we stuck it in her mouth. They went to the dentist and saved her tooth, but they had to put a cap on it. But that was the most dramatic injury during the whole time.

One of the teachers Our back door was really heavy, and she caught her hand in the door, but it didn't break any fingers. It really skinned it.

When I was teaching the two weeks in Harmon, this little boy was subject to epileptic fits, and I had never seen one. It was recess time, and the kids knew all about it, but I didn't know. And here he was, poor little guy, just

Shaking all over?

Yes, and couldn't move. And the other teacher came out, and I think they put a spoon under his tongue. She knew what to do, because I didn't.

To keep him from swallowing his tongue.

And the only other time was when I was teaching at Lone Tree, we always went out and played softball at recess time. I was up to bat, and I swung so hard I just went around and fell down, ripped my knees and my nylons—missed the ball, too. But one particular time, why, this little guy was pitching, and the ball came right in the stomach of the batter. And, oh, he dropped to the ground and was going round and round and round in circles.

What about problems that people are dealing with today—the reason that they have so many counselors? Could you see signs of child abuse or family problems? Did you ever run across anything like that that was apparent?

Yes, in the later years I did.

Not in the early years. Not in the 1960s when you first started?

No. I didn't. Maybe I didn't know enough to notice it. But there were a couple of instances. This one little girl, she was like

sixth or seventh grade, she turned her parents in.

For child abuse?

Yes. Kids are smart. They know how to outfox the fox. And when it was a law that kids could turn in their parents, she did. Now, I assume that she probably had a reason, but I do think the children, like everything else, once you give them something that's good, then they abuse it. But it's not only kids—adults do the same thing. But I don't know what happened there. I don't know whether they were beating her or not.

But there was this little boy who was . . . oh, he was so cute. Cute little kid. And he didn't talk much or anything. He'd have these scratches or something on him. I'd ask him how he did it. Well, he did something. And then he came to school smelling like diesel, and his little shirt and undershirt was soaked with diesel fuel. Well, that just burns and stings your skin something terrible. So when he got there, I took those shirts off him, and I washed his little back off with soap and water and tried to get that stuff off and washed out his clothes. Then I think I sent somebody home to get a shirt or something for him, so he'd have some clothes until it dried. I wanted to turn his folks in, because it seemed to me like . . . because I had kept asking around, but nobody would say anything.

Too much silence.

Yes. See, they were afraid to say anything for fear the parents or the father would do something, because they were working at Coaldale, and he came from Coaldale. But I'd seen signs, and I had asked around, and I asked him, but I couldn't get anything. Well, then I think maybe the health nurse might have gone out there. Then they left. They just took off.

They took the little boy with them, so there was no way to track down whatever happened to him?

I just felt so bad for some of them, especially the ones that came to Coaldale. The first time I ever saw head lice was from Coaldale. I never saw it when I was growing up, never saw it when I was teaching, never saw it anywhere. This little girl, I think she was probably third or fourth grade, and she had this mass of hair: she had a lot of hair. It was beautiful hair, but it was never combed, because it was too ratty to comb. She was doing her math in here, and I was standing over, watching, and pretty soon I saw this in her hair . . . something moving. And I thought, "What's that?" And I started looking, and she was absolutely infested.

I didn't know what to do for her. I had heard about it, and I had seen a poster somewhere from the school, but I didn't even know what to look for. I didn't even know what they looked like. Well, I'll tell you, I did get an education. [laughter]

Did you have to treat all of the kids and let parents know?

Yes. I think I had Colleen take her home right then while I took care of her kindergarten class. I just gathered them up in my room, and we read stories or watched something. Anyway, it wasn't any problem.

And Colleen was the nurse?

She was our kindergarten teacher and my aide. And she took her home in the bus, because all the rules and regulations If you wanted to go somewhere, you could take students home in your car, but you can't do that anymore.

One time when I had all the kids, all eight grades, I heard all of this whispering during recess time. They were going to go home for lunch, they said. Well, then after

lunch they didn't come back to school. Because of all of this whispering, I thought, "There's something going on here." So I just walked out. I left my kids. There wasn't anybody there. I said, "I'm going to go get those boys." I got in my car, went down to the swimming pool, and there they were. And so I gathered them up. [laughter] They were in their swimming trunks. I took them home. I told their moms, "Now, these boys were down at the pool. They need to get dressed and come back to the school." And so, that's what they did. [laughter] But you couldn't do that anymore.

You were also the truant officer?

Yes, I guess so. Whatever had to be done, I did it—it was just something you had to do. But there weren't any repercussions or anything, and nobody got on me for leaving my classroom without supervision, which now you have to have. And those kids, they were good. There weren't any tattletales, "Somebody did this while you were gone."

I always told them, "I want you to be better when I am gone than when I am here."

And they always said, "Well, we know when Mrs. Merritt's mad from the way she walks." It's when I walk like this. [demonstrating]

You stomped?

No, I didn't stomp. I just walked fast, and I always wore heels. I always dressed up, and I had my jewelry and heels and hose and everything. But I walked fast. And boy, they knew if they heard me walking fast, that they better watch their p's and q's. And then they really shaped up. Usually, it took a long time [for me to get mad], but I wouldn't put up with much. And if it persisted Well, one time I didn't call their mom, I called their dad at work. And it was the boss's son.

One of the bosses at the mine?

Yes, one of the bosses at the mine. And his little boy was intelligent. After that his mom came to school every day to see that he got his work done.

The dad said, "This is a zoo in here." And I said, "This is mild." [laughter] It seemed to me like when the managers came, which is

You mentioned that there were some differences in children, not based on mining versus other occupations, but based on their parents' positions in the company. Can you talk about what you observed? Just in general terms. Of course, there's always exceptions.

It seemed like in the families with the higher positions, management positions, the children felt they were freer to do whatever they chose to do within a classroom, regardless of inconvenience to anyone else. And I did not approve of that attitude. I would have just as soon have corrected it within the classroom, but I was not really allowed to. The parents would tell me that they would handle it. All they [parents] wanted me to do was to call them, and they would take care of it. And that's the way it went. But it seemed to me like it undermined the structure of the classroom. I didn't feel badly about it. I didn't think they were criticizing me. I felt that they were really, truly trying to take care of their children, like parents acting responsibly. Those children knew that they would probably get into trouble at home, so I don't know why they felt that they had to prove something in the classroom, but it was the management's children that did that more often than not.

Of course, there would be some children that were having family problems at home, and they would be disruptive and ornery. But it wasn't quite the same.

But you're talking more about an attitude of, "I can kind of do what I want to here, because my dad's the boss."

Sometimes they told me that, and I would say, "Oh, I really don't care." [laughter] And it's not a bad attitude, but children really don't know where to use it. They're not adult enough to know.

Whereas, a boss in the company may need that attitude to gain some respect and control of workers, when children try that out, it's not very

No, the other kids don't like them. So, naturally, if they don't like somebody, they're going to do mean little things, underhanded. Then, of course, that child has a right to be upset, and he has a right to get even. But I told them, if you want to fight, go past the gate after school and give it to him. [laughter] We didn't allow fighting on the playground. Any type of confrontation we had to settle, I tried to show that there are other ways of settling a dispute than fighting. But there were times when someone just needed to knock a bully for a loop. We had a superintendent—when kids would get in a fight, he brought out the boxing gloves. And I'll tell you, that stopped them. They took a few fisticuffs, and they found out. And most of the time, if you confront a bully, he'll back off and turn and run.

Exploring the management issue—you said the management people you knew at the mines were nice people?

They were considerate, kind, thoughtful, and would be appalled if they thought their children were behaving in this manner. They would certainly not approve of it. And I'm sure that they did want to know, and they should know, because then they could talk to their children and explain

that you don't act like a lord over someone else, because you won't have any friends if that happens.

If the child had the problem and brought it to his mom or the teacher, "I don't have any friends," the teacher should say, "Well, I have friends, what are you going to do about it?" And let them go at it and figure it out and make it their responsibility, even though I feel for children. But there was never any contention between the school and the parent when it came to that. It would be a matter that they would handle at home, and it seemed like it would work.

But did they manage to resolve it with the child?

Yes, somewhat. I don't know whether they were over-sensitive or . . . I don't know really what they felt, because you couldn't get a child to tell you how they really felt.

They might not have had words for it at those young ages?

Or didn't know how he felt, and I'm sure not *why* he felt that.

But somehow, through the children, there was a reflection of the hierarchy between management and workers? And they were somehow expressing that in their interactions at school.

I think so. I really believe that.

Like children playing dress-up, they were trying out roles?

I believe so. Right offhand, I can't think of any boy that was a jolly old fellow, where everybody really liked him, whose father was in management. Some of the girls—the girls were lovely. They really were. They were very respectful, intelligent, inquisitive,

inquiring, creative. But I think it showed up in the boys more than the girls.

And I was really surprised when I finally thought about how many of those children in that classroom had the same parents.

Brothers and sisters. You had a lot of brothers and sisters?

Yes, but then it seemed to me like there were more divorced parents with children in the classroom than there had ever been before.

In what year did you start to notice that?

It just seemed like it was in the 1970s, maybe the late 1960s, because maybe their mother would come to enroll them, and then the child would tell me his name, and I knew that wasn't her name. And especially with the mining workers but very few of the management. They seemed to be stable.

So you had stepfamilies. Was that what you were starting to see?

Yes, stepfamilies, stepfathers, and stepmothers. And I think for the children that were what we might call quote "discipline problems," that would probably be the cause, because there would be a stepfather or a stepmother that they were still uncertain about who they were.

So those were big changes over the twenty-five years. Because in the 1960s you weren't seeing that, and then in the 1970s you were starting to see that?

I was certainly . . . I was glad to retire. By 1985 I hated to get up and go to school.

You did?

I did not want to go.

It was not the same job?

No.

What was so different about your days?

The classroom was chaos most of the time. No, I did not have control. I was always after somebody all of the time. I couldn't teach anybody anything, and that was my job and my responsibility. I took that to heart, and it just aggravated me that these children would not adhere to our classroom rules. They would be disrupting me, and they would be disrupting other kids. It was just terrible, and I hated it.

Did it happen overnight, or did it start gradually in the 1970s?

No, closer to the end of the 1970s, beginning of the 1980s. By then I had twenty-eight years, and I really should have gone two more years [before retirement], but I could not face the thought of two more years of that. I felt that it was going to be like that and worse. I felt I had a good reputation as a teacher, and I didn't want to blow it, because I might have taken one of those little kids and turned him over my knee and really gave it to him. And then the school would have a lawsuit. That's when they don't back the teachers.

They wouldn't allow it. So it had changed that much?

Oh, yes.

To the point where you weren't feeling successful?

No, I was not. And I didn't like that. I should have taught two more years, because when you retire and you don't have your thirty years in or you aren't sixty, they cut out a pretty good portion of your retirement.

When I first started teaching, I got \$125 a month, and I thought, "Oh, wow! I can live like a queen!" And if I can retire on \$500 a month, I'll live like a king and go wherever I want. Well, \$500, you can't even get out of town now. But I didn't realize that then.

So it was a hard decision to retire early, financially anyway.

Well, yes. And I had over two hundred . . . a hundred and some [sick leave] days. I could have signed my contract and taken sick leave that whole next year and not taught a day, but I couldn't do it. Morally, I couldn't do it. But I should have, because I would have had another year towards my retirement, and I would have gotten full pay.

It seems too bad that, as much as you liked to teach, you ended on a note of not feeling successful.

Well, I felt I was successful. I felt I still was, but in the meantime, my husband passed away in 1983. I had the ranch; I had the mine; I had my house; we had a house in Mina.

You had all of that to take care of. You had what mine?

Nate had eight mining properties. They weren't working mines, but we had to get the assessment work done, and we had to file the papers. We had to do this with BLM, and we had to put up something or other—all these extra things. It may not have been that much, but I felt that it was.

Plus, the loss of your husband . . . it's pretty hard to keep going at a job like teaching when you've gone through that kind of a loss.

Well, I think it was the best thing for me, though, because I had to be up and going.

What happened? What did he die from?

Just like that. It was his heart, a heart-attack. The night before was eighth grade graduation up here, and for the first time in all of his thirty or forty years we had lived here . . . Well, we always helped put the chairs away and cleaned up the community center. This time he said, "Come on. Don't help them tonight. We've done this long enough." So we came home, and we had coffee and cake. We stayed up and talked until about eleven, and then he went to bed, but I couldn't sleep. I kept tossing and turning. So I came out on the couch, because I didn't want to keep him awake.

I heard him get up really early in the morning, then I dozed back off, and I heard him go back to bed. He had this apnea, you know, where you don't breathe for a long time, and then you take a big breath. Well, I heard one, and I thought, "Boy, that really was a big one." And I didn't . . . I had no idea that was his last breath.

I didn't get up until maybe six-thirty or seven, and I tiptoed in there to get the clothes I was going to wear and took a shower. And when I was coming back from the dresser, I looked at him, and he was laying there, but he wasn't moving. Then it dawned on me, "Something's wrong."

What a shock!

It was, but I'm so grateful that that's how he went, because he was never one to be sick or not busy. He always said, "Well, I'm not going to let those doctors practice on me." [laughter] But I should have been more aware. I've never been around anyone that was sick, so I didn't know really what to look for, because he was helping me transplant the flowers just two days before that. And I don't know whether he stubbed his toe, but

he fell. There was a kind of a "humph!" I thought he just stubbed his toe, but if he stubbed his toe, he would have been able to catch himself, but he didn't.

That was unusual for him to fall? Because he sounds like he was a strong, active man, if he had mines and property and cattle.

He was strong.

So, then you went on and taught two more years before retiring. Did the town have a retirement party for you? Did they do something special?

Yes, they did. They had it at the community center. And I got a plaque and a ten-ounce bar of silver—Delta Kappa Gamma ladies came from Tonopah, because I belonged to Delta Kappa Gamma, a teacher's society. And the kids at school, they all made a block of a quilt, and they drew their picture and signed their names. And Cleo, bless her heart, she took it home and put it together. And here's this beautiful quilt. I've got it put away, because I will never use it. It was towards the end of school. We were having graduation practice and kindergarten graduation practice, and we had sports awards night. We had all of those things at the end of the school, so the students had to go to different places during the day. Well, Cleo said, "Now, we want so-and-so to come and practice this." What they were doing over there was drawing their picture in the other room so I wouldn't know.

And you didn't know, so it was a complete surprise, the quilt?

Oh, it was. I was thinking of hanging the quilt up there [indicating a wall in her home], because those pictures were so darling, so cute.

So you evidently won some friends in this town over the years.

Oh, yes. Yes. And that's why Anne Tomany said, "Get out of Silver Peak. Don't stay there." She was the teacher and the county coordinator here before we had a superintendent of the schools. But then she died two years after Nate did. Where would I go? I've been here since 1956. That's forty years now. And all of my friends are here. And I know if I needed anything at all everybody would come, and I would do the same for them.

I wanted to put on my gravestone up there, "Here lies Alberta. She was here temporarily." [laughter]

She was just going to be here for a little while, and she spent at least forty years plus here. Is Nate in the cemetery here?

Yes, he is.

I wanted to talk to you a little bit more about the role that women played in Silver Peak, because you arrived in the 1950s and have been here since then. Were women working when you first came to town?

The only one that I can recall would be Ruby Shirley at the time, and she was postmistress. There just weren't any other jobs available for anybody to even apply for. Some of the women here might have worked as waitresses at Coaldale. And other than that, there wasn't anyone that I can think of. During the 1950s, there just wasn't anything going here.

There were no mining operations at that time, no businesses.

No, no. And then in 1961, the Leprechaun Company was trying to get a bigger company interested in the dry lake bed. I'm not sure when that started

operations, but the bookkeeper was a gentleman, Jim White was his name. And I don't believe there was anyone else in the office, just the bookkeeper. Then I think probably in the middle 1960s, whenever Foote Mineral started up, then there were women in the office. Then women were out on the lake doing whatever work was required out there.

Right along with the men?

Right. Right. So that was about . . . I would say mid-1960s and early 1970s. Then, when Sunshine Mining Company came, women could apply for a job anywhere, whatever was available—out on the lands and in the cleaning and cooking, bookkeeping, office work. Women would clean houses for the miners, or they had a bunkhouse down here, and there was a lady, Sally, who would cook for them and kept the place clean. I don't know whether she did their laundry or not. She may have. I had several friends that worked in the office up at Nivloc at the Sunshine Mill.

But other than that, we had women teachers and women aides at school. And we had men teachers, too, but we never had a man aide. Usually, kindergarten teachers were women, and the bus driver was a young girl, and she was an aide.

So it was really just starting to change when you came to town. And within the space of about ten years, what women could do changed quite a bit.

And then someone would remark, "Well, now, who does she think she is, getting out there? You know, she can't do that work." Well, she *could* do that work. Remarks were made that women were more efficient with their hands and had more foresight than some of the others, so I was quite proud of them.

You were pleased when they started doing some of the [traditionally] men's jobs?

Yes, and doing it successfully and sometimes even better. I thought, "Good for her."

When you started working, were there any comments about you working, or was working as a teacher one of those acceptable jobs for a woman?

Oh, yes. Yes.

Any comments about you working and having a family?

I don't believe so, no, because my husband wouldn't let me start working until the children started to school, which was fine with me. Cheryl, my youngest, was in second grade when I started teaching here. When she started to school, then I would sub around the county. I would go to Goldfield or Fish Lake Valley just for a day. And every Friday I would [go] to Goldfield. Anne Tomany was the elementary teacher, but she was also county coordinator, because we didn't have superintendents in those days here or county superintendents for school boards. So I would take her classroom while she did all of the office work. That's how I really started here in Esmeralda County. But there wasn't any discussion. It was just something that was accepted, because they had had women teachers here. I was just another one come to do the job, I guess.

When you say your husband wouldn't let you go back to teaching until the kids were raised, was he in charge of those kinds of decisions in your family?

No, not really. I suppose if I forced the issue, I could have gone ahead. But I never usually went against his wishes, because I

never really had to. And because I told him when we started a family and they started to school, we were going to stay in one spot. We weren't going to go flip from one place to the other. So it was kind of even-steven, I think.

You both had things that you said, "This is my bottom line."

Yes, and it wasn't any big hassle, because I agreed with him, more or less, too.

You wanted to stay home and raise kids?

Because when they started in first grade (at that time we didn't have a kindergarten) they're gone from home.

They're gone. It changes after that?

It surely does.

When you first got here, Ruby and Marie were the only two working women, is that right?

The only thing we didn't talk about was Marie and Jimmy at the Shifting Sands. Ruby was the only one, because Marie didn't come until maybe a year or so after we were here. But she was in and out of here, because she was still working in Hawthorne, but I'm not sure what she did.

Oh, then she eventually stayed here and helped Jimmy Gavin run the Shifting Sands Bar?

Yes. But other than that . . .

Other than that, women didn't work. Was that by tradition, or was that because of the economy or both? Because the economy was poor: there were no mines working.

I think it was just because there were no jobs.

But if there had been jobs, it would have been OK for women to do things like cooking and cleaning and restaurant work, laundry work. It wasn't that they couldn't work, but at that point, they were not working in the men's jobs in mining?

No, no.

That's the part that came later.

Because I don't know of any woman that actually worked in a mine. Now in the mill and lab, I'm sure they did. It seems to me there's the old thought that a woman is bad luck in a mine. The miners don't want to have the women in the mine. And it's just an old, old thought that's been around forever, I think.

Is that still true, do you think?

I kind of think so. Now in Beatty, those mines are going, and I don't know whether they have women in there or not, but I know there's women truckdrivers at Candelaria and at Round Mountain. Those huge haul trucks—they drive those and also drive truck at American Resources in Goldfield. There was a girl from here, a young woman from here who went over there, and she was a truckdriver. [laughter] And then Homestake Mining Company, they were hauling ore out of Gabbs—Green Springs, I think, it was from way up in the mountains. And you had to come down by Berlin-Ichthyosaur State Park and out on the highway, but that's a steep grade down. There was a lady that drove the truck. And they would weigh their load at Luning at the truck station there and then come in to Silver Peak. There were lady truckdrivers doing that. And there's been quite a few lady geologists here.

And it would be interesting, wouldn't it, to find out if there was ever a woman working

underground at the Mary Mine in any capacity at all?

I'll bet there wasn't. I'll bet not. I don't think so. I've never heard of any, and I'm sure I would have heard, because I'm sure it would have been an uproar. [laughter]

It would have been a big issue?

Absolutely. Absolutely.

Tell me, when you came, Foote Mineral started up after that, and that brought a lot of activity into town. Was anything happening up around the Mary Mine or the Oromonte Mine, any of those locations up in there?

No. No. I don't believe so. The only mine that was doing anything was when the Mohawk reopened. Not Nivloc, but the Mohawk. Where Big Spring is, you just keep going up that road, and that would be the Mohawk Mine. And that was open when I had all eight grades, and overnight I had thirty-five kids.

But then they had a big cave-in, and two miners (might have been three men) They couldn't get them out, so the tunnel was sealed off.

That would have happened shortly after you got here. It was in the first five years or so, is that right?

I think so.

Was that a big tragedy in this community?

It was just awful. I don't like to go down underground.

Have you ever been underground in the mines?

Yes.

Where have you been?

Well, I haven't been anywhere here. I went to Fairview, down in the ore bucket on a cable. And bump, bump, jerk, jerk. And it's a long ways down there. And I just walked through the tunnel and saw where the stopes were and how they have these cribs here for this and that. The only other place I went down underground was at the test site out of Nellis . . . no Mercury. We took a tour for the school district. I guess, the school board was going on a tour. Tours were being offered, and we went down where they first put this big machine, and they took it down part by part. That machine is as long as this building and perfectly brand new. It was used only once for test purposes, and it's still there. They can't take it out, but that's where they found how to make teflon. It was an accident. But that time we had a cage, and it was electric. It was pretty cool.

Totally different than going down in the ore bucket?

Oh, gosh, yes. But I was always glad to get up on top. I'm not an underground person.

OK. Tell me about when you moved to Silver Peak. Were there any women's clubs or organizations at the time? I know it was a real quiet time in terms of local economy, not many people living here.

No. Usually every Sunday we'd have a potluck, and we'd go out to Coyote Knolls, because it's flat on top and the kids could run. There's just salt flats around and not many bushes, so the snakes wouldn't be there, and the kids could run and play, and no one would have to worry about danger. Everybody would bring something good to eat. There were such good cooks here in Silver Peak. I remember, I baked two or three lemon pies with all the meringue, and

I put them in the back window of the car. And Leona was maybe two, and she got in the car. My husband was coming home from the substation, and here's Leona licking the meringue off. [laughter] I was upset, and they thought it was funny.

Then at Christmastime everybody would have open house, and people would come and have a drink or coffee. And then they'd leave and go to somebody else's house, and pretty soon we'd leave and go to somebody else's house. We just made the rounds, but it was just up and down this street—that was all the people that were here. There was Ruby Shirley and Harvey and Virginia Humphrey and Jean Marie and Johanna Cameron.

So it was really informal. It wasn't like a group that met every other Thursday or something.

No, no. Not at that time. Later on, when Foote Mineral started, then they would meet. I don't know as we really had a name for it, but we would meet maybe for a crafts thing. Whatever you were working on, you could take there, and we would just meet and visit and whatnot at the community hall. We started to make a quilt, and everybody had to make their block. But I don't know what happened to that, because I think it disbanded.

I think the thing is that it just seems like everybody here always has things to do. You had to go so far to get groceries or clothing or to go to doctors or dentists. And for the people working on shift work, their days would change between day shift and night shift. They would go to town on their day off, which might be in the middle of the week or something like that. So it was kind of hard, but those who could, would come.

When my girls were little, I went to Fish Lake Valley to take them to 4-H meetings. Because I was their mother and their teacher. I didn't want to be their 4-H leader,

their Girl Scout leader, and all of that, too. I thought they needed to have a little more exposure than that. And then they took their stuff to Bishop to the fair and all came home with blue ribbons for what they had made, so it was a good experience for them.

There's always been someone every once in a while in town that would say, "Why don't we do this?" And one of my friends, who is deceased now, we had an aerobics class. And boy, every Tuesday night, we'd be there doing these exercises. We'd do it at her house, or they'd come to my house. And we'd stretch, and we'd do the bars. It was just a regular thing.

We had a pinochle club. There were eight people, and we took turns going to their house. We'd have two card tables, and we'd play partners. It would be my turn to have refreshments or snacks at my house. At the time we would say, "Who's going to be the next house?" We had first prize and booby prizes, and it was fun. It was just a get-together of people who liked to play cards. And then it just got to the point where, well Bonnie got really sick, so . . .

That's your friend who passed away, Bonnie?

Yes. Bonnie Burton. In the summertime, she always said, "I love to have parties. We're having a barbecue. Come on, you two!"

I said, "What shall I bring?"

"Nothing!" Well, I would always take something.

We had swimming classes, but I had knee surgery on both knees (not in the same year). I would go down at nine in the morning and swim for an hour before the children came and did my water aerobics in there. Then Bonnie said, "Well, maybe we can get together," because she taught water aerobics in California. Then she'd go down at nine o'clock, and we'd all do these water

exercises for an hour, and we did that for a long time.

We've always had something going . . . something doing. I've heard people say, "Oh, I can't stand to live here! There's nothing to do!" Well, the thing is, you have to make something to do.

I don't think my children were ever bored, but the kids here now say, "There's nothing to do." My kids could go to a certain friend's house. But more often than not, if they wanted to have company, they came to our house, because I didn't know what they did in other homes, since I had never been there. The kids I knew, and they were always wanting to come to my house.

I would say, "How long can you stay?"

"Oh, we can stay all day." [laughter]

I'd say, "Oh, I'm sorry, but when three o'clock comes, her daddy comes home. Then you all have to leave. Or you can stay for an hour, and then they have things they have to do." So that's how I controlled that, because I didn't really want to have kids in my yard all day. And I wouldn't let my kids go for all day to someplace else either.

Tell me what organizations you have belonged to, and did you help start them? Like the group that's making the refreshments now for the Mineral Ridge Resources open house.

Beta Eta—it's Beta Sigma Phi, and our chapter is Nevada Beta Eta. It started with some of the young mothers. I think this is our fifth year. They just sent a circular around inviting us to see if we would like to join, just to have a social group for ladies in our community. And the first time they recruited members, at that time I felt that I didn't have enough time to devote to it, to do anything well, but the next time, then I joined. At that time I was still quite involved in Delta Kappa Gamma, but I had to go to either Hawthorne or Tonopah to their meetings. Beta Eta meetings would be

here in Silver Peak, and I thought, "Well, I can stay home and still go out." I didn't help start it (Delta Kappa Gamma) but I was invited to join in Tonopah. I held chapter offices and a state office as personal growth chairman. I was the president in our chapter and recording secretary and treasurer for at least ten years, besides on committees. There weren't enough of us to each have a chairman of a committee. You're just a committee, and you probably had your name on three or four, because we all had to work together. And that's how it is with Beta Eta, too. We don't have that many members now, so everybody's on a committee. If we had a bake sale, or if we had a car wash, or if we had a yard sale, why, everybody pitched in and did everything anyway.

You said that your husband belonged to the Elks, so were you involved in that?

Yes. I belonged to the Does then, and I was their musician for all of the time that we had it.

Their musician? What instrument do you play?

Piano. Then I think there weren't enough members left in Goldfield for the Does to have a chapter, so I think they either transferred over to Tonopah, or we just closed up the Does section there and went to Tonopah. Anyone would be welcome anytime in Tonopah, whether we were members of their chapter or not.

What about church? Has there always been church here since you have been here?

No, not a church per se. When we came, there was a lady, Virginia Scott was her name, and her husband worked at the substation. She would have Sunday school every Sunday. It was non-denominational, and all of the kids would go. Once a year she

would take all of the kids to the park and to church in Bishop. And at Easter, we would always have an Easter-egg hunt, either out at the sand dunes or around her house or around the school. I'm not sure what year she left, but she remarried after her husband, Frank, passed away, and they moved to Texas where his family was.

Then what happened to church and Sunday school when she left?

I think that a minister, Bob Mann from Goldfield, would come over on a Sunday, and he would have church in the community building. I don't know how long that lasted, and I don't know when they decided to get a church here. After my children left, I wasn't involved in church, although I played piano for weddings at the church and things like that. I played for the school programs and graduations after I retired.

And so this church that's here now, which you say is a Baptist church . . .

I think it is, but I'm not sure.

Do you remember when that came?

No, I don't know. I believe that ground belonged to Elton and Jewel Parsons, and I'm sure they just donated it to the community. I don't know how the church was built or how that came about, but Connie Reed would know; Scott Reed would know; Christa Gaddy would know.

You talked earlier about how the kids got to and from school. Would you explain where the kids came from and who drove the buses.

OK. When school reopened, I don't know what the children did who went to high school. There may not have been any

high school students, but if there were in the first part of the 1960s, they probably boarded out with families in Tonopah.

There was no daily transportation back and forth?

No, not at first. I would think maybe in the beginning of the 1970s or maybe late 1960s, then we started having a bus system. But before that everybody had to walk. The upper Foote Mineral trailer park wasn't there then.

The trailer park?

Yes. It was at the far end of town from the school. And then, if there were children at Coaldale, the kindergarten teacher would drive the bus out to pick up the kids. About seven in the morning they would get back, and we would just stay in the classroom until I think there was always a bus from Fish Lake Valley to Tonopah, and they would meet at Blair Junction where the highways meet, not at Coaldale.

Yes, which is highways 265 and 95.

Yes. If there were any high school students here—and later on there were—then they would get on the bus here at seven in the morning, go out to Blair Junction, and they would catch the Fish Lake bus to Tonopah. And if there were any kids from Coaldale, they would be on that Fish Lake bus to the junction and then into here. Then there was a law passed that if it was over a mile, they couldn't walk to school anymore. They had to have a bus. Well, then, pretty soon there was a bus wagging up and down right here in town.

Before that, all the kids walked to school. Describe for somebody who has never been to Silver Peak—there aren't homes outside

of Silver Peak. People live here in town and then go out to the mine area. Is that right?

Yes. We had one family. Well, this is when the school closed in the 1950s. In order to reopen, I think they needed to have seven children. It might have changed to five. And Billy Conley had a big cattle ranch in Fish Lake Valley and had grazing rights near Silver Peak. He would send his cowboy over to live here, and his cowboy had five kids. So we got those five kids in school. Well, Billy Conley was on the school board at the time, so the cowboy brought his kids over here, and with the two here, we had enough to start the school up again. We didn't want it closed, because we felt that if it were closed any length of time, they would forget it was ever a school.

I think a school and a post office are the two mainstays of a community. And if the school were closed, we wouldn't have anything here. That would keep people from coming in. When people come to work for these companies now, the first thing they're going to ask, "What kind of a school do you have?" Of course, there's no gas station now and no grocery store, but there is a post office and a school. Without them, they're not going to come.

So the closest place to get gas is probably Coaldale, which is about thirty miles from here?

Twenty-one to the junction, so a total of twenty-seven miles.

So people kind of have to plan ahead about gas.

Oh, yes. Yes. But we haven't always been without gas, because a gas station was here when Harvey Humphrey was alive. That was his gas station. We'd call him up, and he'd meet us down there so we could get gas. Or if he trusted us, why, he gave us a key, and

we could get our own gas whenever we wanted to and just write it down on the paper. At the end of the month, he'd total it up and send you a bill. But then, when he passed away, then Alice and Hefty [Sanderson] had it, but they sold it, and this other fellow has it. He's still in charge of everything, but nothing's going.

So you lost the gas station fairly recently, is that correct? Just in the last few years?

Yes. Yes. Ed Brown always has five gallons of gas down there, so if they need five gallons to get to town, they go see him. And for himself, too, because he's running all around the hills and going to jobs, and if he gets low before he gets to town or Coaldale, he needs it, too.

Does his business here have a formal name?

He calls it Ed Brown Trucking. He logged most of his life in California and did trucking, but now he says he's into mining.

So he keeps five gallons of gas around, plus he's very handy at helping to repair all kind of things, mechanical repairs? So although there is no gas station, he's the source of help if people are having problems?

Like a garage, and he is very handy. If something has to be fixed and he doesn't have the part for it, he'll make a part. No matter what it is, he'll make it work.

That's a valuable person in a community like this.

Oh, I should say.

You've been retired for a while. Is the transportation for students still the same?

I don't keep up on it, but one year they bused the upper grades . . . maybe the seventh and eighth grades to Goldfield for a year. They wanted to bus the whole school, but the parents (and I'm certainly with them) are not wanting to have those little kindergarten or first graders go for that long of a day. They couldn't come home until the upper-grade kids came home. They never did take the lower-grade kids, but they have done that a couple of times. Now, I don't really know how successful that was. It may have been great, but they didn't do it long. I don't know whether they got an influx of students in Goldfield and couldn't handle that many in their classrooms. That could be it, because the mines were opening up in Goldfield. Now we have an activity bus for kids that want to stay for football or basketball. When my girls were in high school, they had good girlfriends, so they each stayed with their best girlfriend's family.

So they boarded?

Yes, it was just like another member of their family, and my girls were into everything. They were cheerleaders, drill team, science club, future homemakers.

So they were busy during the weeks while they were gone?

Oh, yes. And they always had something to do on weekends—basketball games, football games. They always had to go. Often times, I have been there at the high school parking lot at three o'clock in the morning waiting for the bus to get in from some game down in Shoshone, but they managed really well. And they stayed with really nice people, good families, so I never had to worry about them. And the families were generous—gracious enough to accept another girl in their household, so it worked out good, really good.

VIVIAN BARTAK

VIVIAN BARTAK arrived in Silver Peak in the 1960s to join her husband, who was employed by Foote Mineral Company. She has observed changes in the area over the past thirty years from the vantage point of the town's post office. After working part-time, Vivian assumed the position of postmaster after Ruby (Shirley) Griffin retired in 1993.



VICTORIA FORD: It is August 12, 1996. I am here with Vivian Bartak at Mineral Ridge Resources in Silver Peak. Vivian is the postmaster for Silver Peak, and we are going to start talking about her memories. Let's start with your connection to Nevada.

VIVIAN BARTAK: I was born and raised in Nevada.

When were you born and where?

I was born in Contact, Nevada, on February 6, 1924.

And tell me where Contact, Nevada, is.



Contact, Nevada, is this side of Jackpot, Nevada. It's a mining town. I was born in a mining town.

Was your father a miner?

My father was a miner, and my brother was.

How long did you live in Contact?

I lived in Contact until they closed the high school in my junior year. And then I

moved to Kimberly, Nevada, in a little town called Riepetown, outside of Ely in eastern Nevada.

You finished high school there?

No. I didn't get to finish high school. I only had a few credits to go to graduate, and then I went to work in a boardinghouse up there for the miners at Kimberly, Nevada. And from there, when they had World War II, I moved down to Roseville, California. My sister Peggy and I had to go to work in a cafe at the bus depot there in Roseville until we could both go to work at McClellan Field [U.S. Air Force base at Sacramento, California]. My sister was going to go to work at Mather Field. But we couldn't go to work, because my sister had to get her birth certificate. She and her twin brother were born in Scotland, so we had to wait until my folks sent the citizenship papers down. Then we were cleared, and we both went to work at different fields.

So your parents must have been immigrants then? Your older brothers and sisters were born in Scotland?

No. My mother and dad got married in New York, and my oldest brother was born in New York in 1916. And then my sister, Isabelle, was born in Kimberly, Nevada, in 1917. Peggy and Joe, the twins, they were born in Glasgow, Scotland.

How did that happen?

My mother went over—she was seasick all the way and with three kids. And then she came back. They had a mine up in the hills at Contact, and they went to work there. My sister Betty was born at Contact, and so was I, and my dad delivered both of us.

So the two that were born in Scotland, that was simply because your mother had gone back to visit?

Yes. She went over and had the twins over there.

And then she came back, and your father helped deliver you?

Yes, and I was a twin. My twin brother was stillborn.

So there were two sets of twins in your family.

Two sets of twins.

That runs in your family?

Yes. When my daughter Patty was carrying her second child she lost one. And the doctor told her she was still pregnant, so she was carrying twins. That's when Bobby [grandson] was born.

So you were born in Contact. Were you the youngest?

Yes. I'm the youngest.

OK. And then you went to Kimberly and waited on tables at the boardinghouse. I'm curious about that experience. That sounds like hard work.

Yes. Smiths owned a bar there, and they also owned the boardinghouse. They had places for the miners to live, but they all ate in the boardinghouse. They had I don't know how many tables in there, but it was a big one. And there was my sister, Peggy, and then Jeanette and Missy and myself who worked in there. We waited tables every day.

And tell me what it was like. How early did you start for breakfast?

Their breakfast was five, six o'clock in the morning.

Did you serve all three meals, or were there shifts?

There were different shifts. We rotated. But when you took a breakfast shift, you had to be able to take for the whole table. I ordered for the whole table and carried out for the whole table.

So they could order something different, an individual breakfast?

Oh, yes, individual But on the noon meal and dinner meal, that was potatoes and vegetable and meat. You had to carry all the dishes out for that, and then you had to clear the tables away.

So when you say carry out all the dishes for that, was it served family style so that they sat around and . . . ?

Family style, yes. And we had to be able to carry out all that in our arms and a dish in our other hand.

I see, OK. So that was hard work for a young girl.

Well, it isn't easy work.

No. I don't imagine. So from there you went to McClellan?

Yes. We moved to Roseville and stayed with some friends of ours. My sister was twenty-one, and I was eighteen. I had a boss at one time at the cafe who came up and asked me, "How come you're not serving these guys their alcohol?"

I said, "I'm sure you don't want me to. I'm only eighteen." He thought I was older because I had a streak of grey in my hair since I was seventeen—nice streak.

My sister used to get so mad, because we would go in a bar, and they'd always ask her how old she was, and they wouldn't ask me. She said, "I'm not going to keep bringing out my I.D."

And I said, "Well, you just order a plain Coke, and I'll order a highball. Then when they bring the drinks, you can have mine," because I never cared to drink. [laughter]

Solved that problem. Well, what brought you to Silver Peak? You came in what year?

I came down here in 1967. My brother, Joe, was working for Elton Parsons. That's when Elton and Jewel Parsons had Coaldale, and he had this construction [company] here where my brother was working. Then my husband came down to get a job down here, and he went to work for Parsons first. Next he went to work for . . . then it was called Foote Mineral, and I moved down in the fall of 1967.

Then in 1969 they said they needed somebody to work at the post office, and I had already worked at the post office at Contact. My sister, Isabelle, was postmaster there. When she took a vacation she'd be gone for a whole month. I'd have to go to Wilkins, Nevada, and Johnny Moschetti would have to swear me in, because he was postmaster there, and then I'd work there at Contact while my sister went on vacation. In fact, we did more work in that little post office than what we did here in Silver Peak. And so I went to work here in Silver Peak in 1969 as a part-time, flexible clerk.

I see. OK. So it was part-time at first when Ruby would have been your boss?

Yes. Ruby was my boss.

And were you the only other help she had?

No, Blanche Dalinski was the other clerk. And we had the post office in that little building.

Which is the little, one-room, wooden house? [A small, one-room, wooden building that had been used as the post office sat on Main Street in Silver Peak in 1996.]

Yes. It was cut off in the center, so the front part was the lobby. We didn't even have a safe in there. We just had a square box that we had to lock. And we worked in there until 1976 when they moved in the trailer [a mobile home currently used as the Silver Peak post office].

When you started in 1969 and you were there helping Ruby, what was your first impression of Silver Peak? What was the work load like here?

Well, I was raised in Nevada, so it was just another small town. I liked it. They had a bunch of tramp miners here when I first moved here. They worked for the Mid-Continent, and my brother was one of the miners. There were quite a few people who lived here. There were a lot of miners that lived here.

What would you say the population was when you first got here? It sounds like it was a busy time for Silver Peak.

It was busy when I moved here. Cyprus had their crew, and after Mid-Continent moved out, that's when Sunshine moved in, and they opened up and closed. The third time when they opened up, they were working real strong. My son was working up there in 1983. And I'm trying to think what year it was that Phil Lapp was killed up there at the mine. My son worked up there, and he worked under Phil Lapp at the mine. In fact, I've got pictures of when they had his

funeral, because all of the miners paraded up Main Street, and I took their pictures as they went up Main Street to go to the funeral at the community center.

Was it an accident?

Yes.

What happened?

I don't know exactly what all happened, but it happened underground, and he was killed. I'm getting information from my son. There's quite a few here who would remember when Phil Lapp got killed. It was in the 1980s. And that's when Alice had the Little Miner's Inn—that's where she's at now. And Randy Sloan had Black Mammoth open. The reason I remember that is I made twenty cherry delights and furnished them that day—they had a reception afterwards—because I used Randy Sloan's kitchen over there at the Black Mammoth to make them. When I got through making them, he says, "I hope you got one extra."

I said, "Well, I made this many. If you want one, I guess you can have one."

He said, "No. I'll give you twenty dollars for that pie." And so he took one of the pies.

So the restaurant where Alice is now . . .

That was called the Little Miner's.

And so it was your brother that worked in the mine, not your son? Or your brother and your son both worked there?

No. My brother worked at Mid-Continent when we first moved down here in 1967. But my son had worked over at Round Mountain, and then he moved over here and went to work up at Sunshine, underground. That's my son David.

Son David. Let's stop here and let me orient myself a little bit. Your husband's name was . . . ?

George, he passed away. He was production manager for Foote Mineral.

OK. So he was in mining. And your brother Joe was in mining: he worked for Mid-Continent.

Yes.

And then you have how many children?

I have five.

And your son David is which one in line?

David's the fourth.

The fourth, and he was the miner. And tell me the other children's names.

Patty's the oldest. Sylvia.

Sylvia, who I met, and who is the librarian here.

Georjean and William.

Were any of the others involved in the mining?

No.

Your dad also worked in mining. What job did he do? Was he an underground miner?

No, he was a blaster—one that set dynamite in caps. That's how I lost my fingers was with a dynamite cap.

Is it really. How did that happen? As a kid?

Well, yes. Two sisters, we were real good friends, and we had gone down to the post

office to get the mail. That's when old Vic Marshall was the postmaster, and he also had a grocery store. Well, Tillie Ford, she saw this box, and she just took this item out of it. When we got partway to my house, she showed it to little Helen and me. We had never seen a dynamite cap before. And anyway, I held it, and little Helen Ford struck a match to it. And that's how come I got fingers off. I believe I was around ten years old.

Ten years old when that happened. Were you near a doctor?

No. We had a constable there, and he had to drive me all the way to Elko. That's a hundred miles.

A hundred miles. You were bleeding during that time?

Yes.

You must have been in some danger at that point.

I had to write a year left-handed. [laughter]

Can you write right-handed now?

Yes. I do everything right-handed now.

But for one year you had to be ambidextrous while that healed. Boy!

One year, and I told the teacher, "I'm going to be writing with my right hand when school starts."

So we have your whole family here in Silver Peak. Where did you live when you first came to town?

My husband and my brother were living here, and they were living in Frances

Chiatovich's house. And also, my brother-in-law, Joey Bartak, was living down here then, too.

OK. And was he also in this same household?

Yes.

OK. How did they come to live with Frances?

Frances Chiatovich has a house over here. Grace Ogilvie owns it now. But it was Frances Chiatovich's, and it was for rent. And my brother and my husband, George, they rented it. Frances was living over in Gabbs.

And is that the house you moved into then when you came to town?

Yes, when we first moved here, and then we got a trailer and moved up to Foote's trailer park.

And that's here in town, correct?

Yes. That's still here. My husband, when he first went to work here, he was an operator. And then, when he was made production manager, we bought a fourteen-foot-wide trailer and moved downtown here. I just sold it a few years ago and bought my daughter's trailer. She's got a double-wide.

OK. So your husband worked first as an operator. What was that job?

They call them operators, but they're over the helpers and whatnot in the mill.

So it's like a management position in the mill?

Yes, and then he was made production manager.

OK. All right. And he worked for Foote Mineral the whole time he was here, did he?

Yes. He worked from 1967, and then he got sick. They made him retire in 1982, and he passed away in 1984.

What was he sick from?

He had worked up around lithium a lot, and he had inhaled a lot of that. He fell the one time, and I had to take him in [to the hospital], and they had to go into his chest so he could breathe. After that he just started going downhill.

So breathing the lithium dust is not good to do?

No. You should really have it checked, because when he passed away they told me that he had breathed a lot of that lithium in.

And so they could tell by his lungs. Does it cause the same kind of problem as silicosis? Is it the same thing?

Similar.

Similar. It destroys the lung tissue?

Yes. They wanted to put him on one of those supports [life support system], but he didn't want on it. So we, the kids and I agreed . . . We decided to do just what he wanted.

That must have been hard.

No, he had been sick a long time. He had been in and out of the hospitals, and he was in a hospital bed at home for a couple of years.

Yes. That's hard—to watch him be so sick.

Yes, but you have to endure it.

I guess one of the impressions I think people have is that the lung diseases that miners had is a thing of the past, but you're talking about a husband who just died twelve years ago.

Yes, and he did have a lot of lithium [in his lungs]. They told me that at the hospital. He died in a Veteran's Hospital.

Did he wear a mask when he was working?

Yes, they had to wear masks and what-not. Well, see, he had to load a lot of that lithium when the trucks would come in, and that's hard on him when they have to inhale that all the time.

Because he didn't wear his mask then, or he did?

They'd wear it, but that lithium is just like in powder form. It goes right through it.

I noticed the last time I was here in Silver Peak and the wind was blowing. There was a big dust storm. Does that bother people here? I mean is the lithium in that dust, and does it bother people's lungs?

Yes. It gets mixed in with the dust. There's a lot of minerals in the dust here.

Do people have lung problems here from that?

I don't know.

It may be different than actually being a miner where you're working with . . .

Yes. When you're a miner, and you have to work with that, why it makes a lot of difference.

That's worse? That's more risky?

Yes. See, my daughter worked over in Round Mountain in the lab, and they had to work with the gold. Every so often they had to go and have tests run to make sure that they didn't have too much stuff in their system. And they still have to do that over there, because they can get . . . I don't know if it's too much lead or what it is that they have to watch, because it can kill them.

And is your son's health doing OK, because he's been mining?

Yes. He's doing just fine.

And your brother, did he have any problems from mining?

No.

It seems like it would either get everyone or none at all. How does this happen, do you know?

I don't know.

Do people talk about this? Do you talk about this to other people here?

No, I've just often wondered how come, you know, some of them get sick . . .

. . . and some don't. They manage to do OK. There doesn't seem to be an answer. Did he have insurance? Did the mining company make any kind of accommodations for the fact that he got sick on the job and from the lithium?

He had taken out insurance so that when he passed away, I got so much. He had taken out an insurance policy for \$60,000, but I got thirty. I don't know what happened to the other thirty, but I got \$30,000.

But other than regular insurance while he was alive, there wasn't anything from the company?

No.

Did they give him a retirement benefit or anything?

Yes. He had some retirement, and I get so much of that each month. I also get a cost of living, too, then.

So retirement, insurance—those were the kinds of things that the company provided, and it's the same for everybody whether you get sick based on your work or not. Is that true?

And they had real good insurance on families. They covered doctor bills and everything.

So that helped when you had five children.

Yes. The only thing is my husband was in the hospital in 1983 up in Washoe, and his insurance refused to pay it. That's Blue Shield and Blue Cross. I was covered with my postal insurance, and all I had to do was get a hold of my postal insurance, tell them that I couldn't get his insurance to pay, and all they said was: "Get the bills." His bill at Washoe was \$20,000. My insurance paid it and all the doctors.

Wow! But his insurance wouldn't?

His insurance wouldn't pay. And if anybody ever asks me in regards to getting Nevada Blue Shield or Blue Cross, I say I want no part. And that's why I'm postmaster here, and I take out the postmaster's insurance: that's the kind I have to get. So I belong to the union of American Postal Workers. And I haven't changed, and I won't change.

You were talking about school when you first moved here in 1967. Your children were school age. Is that right? All of them?

No. Billy Joe wasn't. The youngest was not in school.

And so they went to this school right down here which is now . . .

. . . the Vinegaroon Saloon.

Which is what it is now. And Alberta Merritt was their teacher?

Alberta Merritt was the teacher. And so was Lydia Bridgeman. My son, David, was in first grade when we came down here, and Jeanie was in fifth grade. Both of them helped the teachers with modern math. David was able to do third-grade work when he was in first. [laughter]

So that was something that Silver Peak was a little behind on—the modern math.

Yes. Well, see, we moved down from Idaho. We'd gotten married, and we lived in Idaho. We farmed.

Oh, and then your husband came down here to mine? What made him decide to change from farming to mining?

Oh, farming is hard work, and you never make a profit. And he decided to come down and go to work here for Parsons, and then when he went to work for Cyprus, that's when I moved down.

Because you knew you were going to be staying here then. So just two years after you got here, you started working at the post office—part-time at first?

Yes.

And how long were you there part-time?

I was there from 1969 until 1993. That was as a part-time, flexible clerk. And I worked until April of 1993, and then I was made officer-in-charge.

And that's when Ruby retired?

Ruby retired in February of 1992, and James Frayne was the postmaster He was officer-in-charge from February until June of 1992. Then, when he made postmaster, he bid out of here in April, and I was made officer-in-charge. And then in October of 1993, I was made postmaster.

When you say "bid out of here," does that mean he asked for another job?

He bid for another post office up in California.

So then you got your chance to be postmaster after that?

Yes.

OK. Tell me about the changes that you've seen over time here. Let's start with post office changes. You've talked about some technological changes that you've had to get caught up with at the post office.

There's been a lot of changes. When we were in the little building, why, we had a lot of customers, but it was a lot better when we moved into the big post office in 1976. At different times I'd go into Tonopah and fill in if they needed workers there. And when I was in there, I would ask them to teach me all the new things. We didn't have express mail out here, but when I came back from working in Tonopah, I told Ruby, "We're going to do express mail, and I'm going to show you how to do it." And that's when we started doing express out here.

OK, so you started doing that in what year?

I'm trying to think when it was. It was probably in the 1980s. And I even filled in at the post office in Goldfield once. They had a postmaster that needed to go away, and they needed somebody to fill in. So I went over and ran the post office for a whole day.

What other changes did you help bring into this? You brought in express mail.

Yes, we had the express mail, and we have priority. We do an awful lot of priority mail now.

What does that mean as compared to express?

Well, when you send priority mail, it gets there within three or four days, and it goes out in a separate orange bag. And I send more priority than I do express, because they have all taken to priority, and that's what they want. And it's just like the self-stick stamps: I have customers who don't even want to have to lick stamps anymore. And I have collectors here that collect stamps.

So you have to keep a steady supply of those.

Yes. All the new stamps, I get them. In fact, I have a sister that lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and that's what I send her all the time, is our new sheets of stamps. And my son-in-law, he collects stamps, too. So I get the new ones in and buy them, so I can send them to him. But I have two collectors here that, every time a new stamp comes in, they want them.

Are you on computers now?

No. This Friday we're supposed to get a fax machine in and also the machine for using credit cards.

Oh, to accept credit cards for payment.

Yes. One thing with those credit cards, it comes right back whether they're good or bad. Not like checks, because last year I had four checks bounce.

Oh, have you? Is that a lot for you?

We didn't take checks for a long time here at the post office. And now that we accept checks, why it was a shock to me that somebody would write a check to the government and have it bounce. You would think if a person knew that their check wasn't going to be good, that they wouldn't write it to a government place. When they write a bounced check here . . . all of our checks are deposited down in Vegas, so from the post office down there our bosses have to take care of all of that. They [customers] can't come and pay me for it. They have to pay it to Vegas.

So far I've got two express accounts. I've got Cyprus and also Mineral Ridge. They both have express accounts.

Because they're sending things out that need to get there the next day?

Yes. I have one meter. Cyprus has a meter. If Mineral Ridge would get the meters, because they have to bring the machine in every so often and get five-hundred-dollars-worth of stamps, so by them having the meter, all they have to do is weigh their own mail, put the stamps on, and they go through.

Saves time.

Yes, it does. The metered stamp is through Pitney Bowes. And it is a good

business . . . I'm hoping Mineral Ridge will look into it.

Because that cuts down a little bit on your work load, too, if they came to you already metered, right?

Yes. See, they have to bring the machine in, and we set it for them with the new amount, and they just bring in the check for the amount that day.

And metered mail is something new? When did that start? Was that here in the 1960s?

No, I'm trying to think when we got the metered mail. Before, Cyprus had metered mail, but they had it from the Tonopah post office. And then, when they found out that we had metered mail here, they changed it to here.

I see. So maybe in the 1970s, or was that something that came about in the 1980s?

Ruby was still postmaster when we got it, because when they brought the machine in, I'm the one that had to set it. When anything needed fixed, I was always able to fix it. When we closed the other post office up, we had kids that were always breaking windows, and I had to take boards and cover them.

You were the resident handy person. That's part of working in a small area like this. You do everything, is that right?

Oh, yes. When I was clerk, I used to get up in the cupboards and clean the cupboards all out—stand up on the chair and everything. But this last year, [laughter] they told me, "You're not going to be climbing up on those chairs and getting in those cupboards. You can let somebody else do it."

Well, I like to know what's in the cupboards, and I said, "If I can't reach them, I've got to have something," so I got one of those small stepstools to stand on. The old stuff, you have to discard it because it's no good anymore when they come out with new rules and new regulations. When you work for the post office department, you have to go by their rules and regulations on everything. If you have a box rented, you put the notice in on the first. If it isn't paid by the thirtieth, you allow them ten days. And if they haven't paid within that ten days, you close the box and take the mail and put it in general delivery. And if it's in general delivery for thirty days, and if they still haven't come, you have to send that mail out.

Send it back to the return address?

Yes. There's rules to do it all.

Does that happen a fair amount? You know, the thing that I am learning about mining communities is that there is a lot of turnover—that there are people coming and going as the mining business booms and busts, so to speak. So do you get a lot of turnover where people are just suddenly gone, and they don't happen to tell you that they are leaving town or . . . ?

We have some that will leave and never leave a change of address. And we can't do anything with their mail until their box rent comes due. But we have some that have a box, but they never come to pick up their mail. They go four, five, six months at a time without ever picking anything up. And I've often wondered how they can let it go that long, because if I let my mail go that long, I wouldn't get any of my bills paid, because I have bills coming in every month that have to be paid.

Yes. That's amazing to think that there are people that can let that go. Because the only way to get mail in Silver Peak is through the post office box, is that right?

That's right.

I mean there's no door-to-door delivery here.

No.

Has there ever been?

No, there never has been. Sometimes when someone gets express in, and if they can't get to the post office to pick up, I have delivered it. We had some Lange [company in Arizona and California] drillers here the one year (well, they came two or three different years and did work here), but they couldn't get in to pick up their express. That's how they got their checks was through express, so the boss asked me if I could take it and the paper that they had to sign with me when I'd leave at night, and they'd pick it up from me. I'd usually have to meet them, and I'd just lock it in my car.

Because they couldn't get back from their work site before you were closed?

No. They'd be working way out on the lake, and they couldn't get in. I did this for quite a few years. Ruby was postmaster, but Ruby couldn't do it because she had a husband. So I told her, "I don't mind taking it and delivering it, because that express has to be delivered." I've even offered to take it to a person's home, you know, if they can't get in to get it. In fact, last Saturday I drove into Tonopah and picked up an express for somebody here that had checks coming in. I went in and picked them up Saturday morning. They had to have them that morning, because some of them were going away. I took them to the post office, called

the guy and said, "Come and pick them up. I'm here." So he came right to the post office and picked them up.

I bet those are accommodations that wouldn't happen in a big town.

Well, in a big town they have streets, then it's delivered to the streets.

So it's almost like if you didn't do that, you wouldn't be following the rules either. You have to kind of bend over backwards to make those rules fit a small town like Silver Peak, Nevada.

Well, when Harbert Yeargin was here, I stayed open every Friday night, so they could come in and make money orders. Every Friday night those men would come in at five, and I wouldn't get out of there until six thirty. When I went to my one meeting, they said, "Are you putting that time down?"

"No," I said, "Postmasters are supposed to donate something to the community, and me staying at the post office and doing that is for the community." Well, that was their payday. And old Fred, he would go to town and bring the money out for all of them to cash their checks. And I said, "Well, Fred, you can go in there and get all that money and bring it out here. For them to be able to come to the post office and get money orders, I'll stay open." [laughter] I'd stay open so that they could send them.

You're talking about for the good of the community. This has become your home. You came here in 1967, and you are very much a part of this community. Is that true?

Now, a postmaster has to be very careful, because if you're too friendly with some of the people, they'll try to get you to do favors

like, "Will you bring my mail?", "Will you do this?", "Will you do that?"

And when I was made postmaster, I told them, "I'm not going to be taking anybody's mail to them. You can come to the post office and pick up your own mail. You have time. You have eight hours to get there to the post office." And there were a lot of them that didn't even work.

If there's somebody sick and they can't come, and they call and say, "Well, will you drop my mail off?", I'll take it and drop it off for them, because they are sick and can't get out.

So there's a little difference since you've become postmaster. Now that you are a postmaster, there are some limits to how involved you can be.

Yes, there is. There's an awful lot.

Because you probably know things that shouldn't be passed on, too—who's getting what mail.

When you work in a post office, you cannot give out any information. You cannot give out any box numbers to people. If they want to write to somebody locally, they can put the person's name on there, mail it, then it's put in that box, but they don't get the box number.

And there's confidentiality, too, just in terms of you know who's getting what from who?

You've got to be able to have customers that know that they can come in and trust you and get a bunch of money orders. And when they come in and send them off, that is nobody's business but that customer's, who he sends money orders to.

You're not going to turn around and tell the next person what happened.

That's their business. And first thing they accuse you of, "You're reading my mail." If you ever have to sort the mail and then put it in the boxes, and then you have to look at the post office mail Sometimes you don't even get to look at your own mail until maybe the next day.

You don't have time to read their mail?

You don't have time. All you've got time for when you sort that mail is to be able to just look at that mail and put it in the boxes and know exactly where the boxes are to put it in.

What about involvement in the community? Are there community gatherings? Are there potlucks? Are there any activities going on now? Ruby described all the picnics where they would go up to the old Nivloc Park that they created. Are things like that happening now that you get involved with?

No. The only thing they have here now is on the Fourth of July, like the first Fourth of July that the post office put in a float. Junior Toner [Glen Toner Jr.] and Doug Tockey did the Pony Express on two horses. We had Doug Tockey's old vehicle, red one, and we decorated it up, because the post office was 130 years old here this year [in 1996]. We took the blue ribbon. The Pony Express, they got the red ribbon, a round plaque, and a silver platter. But they insisted that all the prizes had to go to the post office, because it was for the post office that they'd gone in [the parade], so I had those at the post office.

I just wanted to mention this on the tape—one of the things that you and Ruby have given me today is a list of all the postmasters since this post office opened in 1866. We will put that in the information that we are gathering about Silver Peak.

[Research information from Silver Peak oral history project is located at the University of Nevada, Reno, Special Collections Department of the Gatchell Library.] It's really great to have that whole list of everyone.

Now if you would like to have a picture of the group that was in the parade, I had some pictures of us. My granddaughter and a friend of hers played their instruments. And Sylvia, my PMR [Postmaster relief], she threw red and white peppermint candy out to all of them along the street.

That's great. Yes. Let's take a look at that photograph. So right now the main community event is the Fourth of July? There aren't any other gatherings?

No. Cyprus at different times has parties, but that's just for their employees. Otherwise, there isn't anything.

And yet, people kind of stay in touch. I think that they go to the restaurant here. I know that I've eaten there several times, and today when I got there, you and Ruby had already had lunch. So there's still ways that people keep in touch with each other here?

The Vinegaroon, it's closed now. Kenny Polman and Sue Allen are going to reopen it, and it's going to be called "Alternative." They're supposed to, I think, have the bar part opened (they're hoping) by the first of September, and then later on they'll add a cafe to it. It's nice to have two places.

Yes, so that you can go to either one for a meeting place. Plus, as we talked with Ruby, the post office is also a place where people run into each other and talk.

Oh, yes. They come in and visit.

Exchange news with each other? So there are ways people keep in touch even without the community events that used to be . . . ?

Oh, yes.

But do you feel like this is your community, like you're at home here and people would help you if you needed help?

Well, I'll tell you something, there are some that I feel I can rely on, but there are some that they just wouldn't do . . . I hate to say this, but this community is just like drug city.

Oh, it is? Really?

They've got drugs here.

Serious drug problem?

Drugs are very bad here.

I'm going to stop this tape for a minute. [Tape on] Vivian and I've gotten into a topic that we are deciding that we are not going to finish on this tape. Vivian is not comfortable giving any more secondhand information on things that she's heard about drugs or opinions that she's formed about drugs. However, Vivian, is it safe to say on tape that Silver Peak is known for having quite a few drugs going through

here? There are drug users here, and there have been some drug busts in this area.

Yes. They've had drugs here. There have been busts here.

OK. So you are aware that there has been drug use in this area. And that's a new problem, would you say?

It's been a problem since . . . oh, it's been a problem since in the 1970s.

So it's kind of an ongoing problem for this community, and it isn't resolved at this point. And is the danger to kids, do you think, who are growing up in this area?

Oh, yes. They have to watch the kids here.

So kids here have to say "no" just like kids in the big city.

That's right. They have to be trained out here just as bad as they do in the big towns.

So the isolation of Silver Peak doesn't keep it safe from all of the problems that the world has now, such as drugs. You're not safe from that?

No, it isn't. It's just as much here as it is in any other small town or even in the big cities.

SHERRY MATTEI

SHERRY (BOYD) MATTEI, the granddaughter of Anna “Baba” Shirley, is related to several prominent Silver Peak families—the Cleary, Shirley, and Chiatovich families. During the 1960s Sherry returned to Silver Peak where she lived with Anna and worked for Foote Mineral, which back then was a newly established business. From her grandmother, Sherry heard the heartbreaking story of how Anna coped with the deaths of several children and dear relatives. An avid horsewoman, Sherry was accustomed to riding throughout the area around Silver Peak. As the years passed, she watched the dramatic changes—artifacts removed, gravestones destroyed, and crime increased. However, never destined to be a ghost town, Silver Peak continued to change with the times.



VICTORIA FORD: Today is September 30, 1996, and I’m here with Sherry Mattei in Silver City, Nevada. We’re at the post office where she is postmaster. Sherry, would you tell me your connection to Silver Peak and some of the families there? We’re going



to kind of trace your family tree on tape, because you’re connected to almost every important name there in town that I’ve come across. [laughter]

SHERRY MATTEI: Important for Silver Peak. Well, my grandmother was Anna Shirley, who was married to John Shirley. She was a Cleary [pronounced Clarey]. Her father worked at the Mary Mine and had several of the livery stables. Her mother was born in Aurora, Nevada, and then they moved to Silver Peak.

That's where the Cleary family name comes in—Anna Cleary married John Shirley. And what do you know of John and Anna?

John originally was from Virginia. He came out West when he was about eighteen with a brother. And then Anna, her family moved from Bodie where she was born. Originally, they moved to Blair.

And John came from Virginia to Silver Peak

Right, to work the mines, or he bought some of the mines. He was in his forties when he met and married Anna. She was sixteen at that time. His Uncle John, his father's brother . . . the story I had gotten was he was married to Belle Star, and that's why several of the children had Belle as the middle name. We looked back through a book, and it looks like it may be more likely that Belle was his uncle's daughter. But there's definitely a connection to the family of John Shirley, who went to Texas.

OK, so let's go back to Silver Peak now. Your grandfather was forty and met and married Anna Cleary when she was sixteen. Will you name their children?

Well, quite a few of the children were deceased or died when they were one or two. But one of the daughters, Ethel, married Hank Gilbert and another one, Virginia, married Harvey Humphrey. And Harvey and Hank were cousins, who then also became brothers-in-law. And my grandmother's sister, Nellie Cleary, married Martin Chiatovich. So that was the Chiatovich relationship.

Yes. Will you name the other children.

There was Louis Shirley; Ernie Shirley who married Ruby, the postmaster; and Ada Louise and Cora both died when they were

two or younger. Anna had five miscarriages. And then there was my mother, Jane Shirley.

OK. And your mother married Gene Boyd. And so Ruby is your aunt?

Aunt by marriage, right.

What you told me is that there were a number of deaths—there were several miscarriages and several children died at a young age. Now, you lived with your grandmother for a while, so you know some information about this. Can you tell me what your grandmother said about that? That's a hard thing for a family.

She said it was worse than knowing that you were going to die. She said there was nothing worse than losing a child. She also lost a lot of her other family members when they were young: her brothers; her sister died in childbirth when she was in her twenties, the one that was married to Martin Chiatovich. And Anna said that was the most horrible thing in her life. She said she had nothing to complain about otherwise, just that that was so horrible, and all of their deaths were pretty terrible deaths. Most of it was due to long, prolonged illnesses—a lot of polio epidemics, hepatitis. My mother was very ill, and she was the youngest child and not supposed to live. But by that time my grandmother pretty much had my Aunt Ethel, the oldest, raising the children.

Was that one of the ways that she coped?

Yes. She said she loved them all, but it was hard to get close to them [her children], because she was so afraid of losing them since she had lost over half her children.

And so she coped with that by having somebody else raise them?

Right—in the same house but distancing herself. My Aunt Ethel at the time was eighteen when she was raising my mother. My grandmother said it was just too hard. She'd be involved with them as far as they could come to her, but basically most of them called my Aunt Ethel "mother," because Anna couldn't get close anymore. It just hurt too much.

At some point did it become acceptable to get close? Did she think there was an age where she could?

She did for a while, but then she had raised one of my cousins—his mother died in childbirth, that was Louis's son—and then he died. He was only thirty-eight when he died, and that's when she really distanced herself again. She was friendly. All the children in town would come to her. Everybody loved her, but it was like there was a wall there. And then my Aunt Ethel did the same thing when she lost her two children. They were warm and friendly, but they were not touchers: they wouldn't hug, nothing.

Did your aunt who lost her children have other children?

These were the only two children she had. One, the little boy, died when he was two. He was the one that was run over by an ore truck in front of her driven by one of the Chiatoviches. It was an accident. And then her daughter was killed around Walker Lake. She fell out of the car coming home from college. And the daughter's room, she never changed it. She never changed the bed. She never took the clothes out of the closet, nothing. And no one else was allowed to go in that room, ever.

Because this was a grown daughter. This daughter had reached what age?

Twenty. She was coming home for her twenty-first birthday. An engagement party, and her graduation from college was also that year. And Ethel didn't handle it well. We were there when the police came. I was fairly young, about ten, I guess. And when they came, it was Thanksgiving day. Ethel went to the oven, took the turkey out, threw it out in the backyard, went into my cousin's room and shut the door, and nobody could get in there. She was in there for about a day and a half. And she said, "That's it. I'm not getting close to anybody ever again." And she didn't. I guess you could say she was cold, but if you needed anything, you could certainly go to her. It was the same with my grandmother.

My grandmother got close to me for some reason. My mother was her favorite—the youngest, the last child, her very favorite. And so I moved back in with her after college, and we were really very close. I was probably the only one at that time that she got close to.

Because she had just put that distance between herself and everyone else for so long?

I think so, and I think she finally just needed somebody, and she felt I was going to be OK. But anytime I would go anywhere without her, she was nervous. If I was going into town shopping, it didn't matter what time, she wanted to go with me. She actually once said, if any of her other children or grandchildren died, she hoped she was with them. And she didn't have a death wish by any means, but she just said she couldn't take anymore.

She just could not bear to lose any more family.

Right. She had lost, she had said at one time, over twenty, and that would have to be terrible. I can't imagine it. I really can't. But

she was never a bitter person, never. Always up, except for that. If you'd talk to her about family, you could see this kind of shadow. It was really sad.

When the children died . . . for the other babies was there a certain age where she let herself get a little bit closer to them?

I guess until probably they were at least ten, and even then she was still a little distanced. It was actually not until they were pretty much grown up or married that she'd get close again.

Did any of the children ever comment to you, any of her children, Ethel or Ernie or anyone, mention ever to you any feelings about their mom not being close to them?

Not too much, no. They said she was always there for them, but they understood. If you went into her bedroom, she'd have one picture of Cora, the oldest one that had died at two. And the picture was about five feet by three feet. And she had pictures of all of her family that had died all over the wall, but none of the living ones, which was odd. And she would not talk about them.

About the ones who had died?

Right. The living ones, yes. She was extremely interested in them—how they were doing, what they were doing. But the others, no. She just wouldn't. And she wouldn't go to the graves.

Just really could not deal with it, as you said.

I would think it would be awfully overwhelming. For most people, I don't know if they could handle that much.

Did the deaths come close together in time?

No. No. From what I could see, not really, over a twenty year period. It was over a long time. But she always was kind of waiting for someone to die. And she was very religious, so she didn't really blame anything or make excuses. But you could tell it just really hurt her. She said it was so much harder on the living, and she said it was just a really tough life. She said she had a wonderful life: she had anything she needed. Monetarily, she didn't care. If you gave her money, she'd give it to somebody that needed it more. But it was just losing the people she loved.

So you could tell that just had such a tremendous impact on her life and who she was and how she lived.

Yes. It really did.

Because Anna, her nickname was Baba [pronounced Bobba].

Right, which is grandmother in Basque because so much of her family married Basque—the Chiatoviches and Banoviches and the whole family.

OK. And so you could tell that she was well-loved in town.

Oh, yes, she was. Her house was never empty, never.

And the community center is now dedicated to her.

Right. The schoolchildren would always stop there after school, and she always had a pot of coffee on and some dessert made. All the miners would stop there. And she had families living with her continually when they didn't have money or didn't have a place to stay. She'd always just tell them there was this spare room, so she was always

doing that. But as far as getting real close to somebody, no, she really couldn't do that.

Interesting. How did you feel about the fact that she chose you?

Very lucky. I adored her. She was the most interesting, neatest person I'd ever met.

What did you find interesting about her?

I guess her one regret was she couldn't get more education. She did finish and get her high school diploma by mail when she was sixty. And when I would go to college or any of my cousins would, we'd always send her our books, our papers, everything. She studied and read everything. She subscribed to over fifty magazines and newspapers. Constantly read. My one uncle, Ernie, who was a geologist, she was really interested in that: why he would think something was where, and how the place was formed She really got into that. Very, very intelligent lady.

I don't want to interrupt your thought stream about her, but let's talk about your connection with her. Now you were not born in Nevada, but you seem more native Nevadan to me than quite a few people. Can you give me a little bit of background on that?

Oh, sure. My mother went to Los Angeles, because she had had several miscarriages herself. My brother's six years older, but she lost quite a few children in between. So the doctor sent her down there for a better hospital. And she never forgave me for being born in Los Angeles. [laughter]

How do you mean that?

Being a Californian, because her whole family had been Nevadans. But I don't know,

I just loved Silver Peak. And when I got out of college, I went back there just to visit.

So you were born in Los Angeles, but then your mother was living in Silver Peak?

Right.

And married to your father. What were their occupations?

He worked for the power company, and she had a teaching degree, but she just worked substitute teaching at that time in Silver Peak. And then he finally did transfer back down to California. That's where he was from.

OK. So how many years of your life were spent in Silver Peak?

The first six and then every summer thereafter. I always came back in the summers and stayed with my aunts and uncles. They had the horses, and that's what I loved to do, was go out with my uncles and do all the assessment work and just be out in the hills. I love the area. It's just an incredible area.

So what are some of your earliest memories of that area?

I always thought it was beautiful. I'm surprised when people say it isn't. It's just peaceful. There's just something very special about it. And there was one Indian medicine woman, a friend of my grandmother's that I used to go out with a lot, Flora Bess, and she talked about it being the Indian sacred ground and Wonder Mountain being their sacred mountain. She would take me back up in those areas.

Now where is Wonder Mountain from Silver Peak?

It's the red mountain up towards Nivloc. You can see it from Coyote Springs. It's more often referred to as Red Mountain. The Indians called it Wonder Mountain.

Do you know what tribe she was from?

She said it was the All-Man's tribe. She wasn't a Paiute. She had a brother who was supposedly an Indian medicine man that lived up in the hills, who most people rarely saw. No one really knows what happened to her. She kind of just left. She lived in a little house there. She didn't drive. She just kind of disappeared.

But she was friends with your grandmother?

Yes.

And she would take you with her up into the hills?

She felt I wouldn't harm anything or bother anything, bother the "spirits" as she called them. So to a child that was pretty fascinating. But she disappeared when I was about twelve.

Do you remember any of the things that she told you about her people or their beliefs about that area other than Wonder Mountain?

Just that there had been very ancient tribes there. She had showed me some petroglyphs, which nobody's been able to find since. My one uncle knew where they were, Ernie, but nobody's found them since.

And do you remember where they are?

Near Cave Spring, and the area actually where the mining company [Mineral Ridge Resources Inc.] is going is all considered the Indian sacred ground. And she used to feel

anybody who didn't respect the spirits, something bad would happen to them. She said that's why so many people that worked at the Mary Mine died so young. She felt it was just very bad luck. So it was pretty interesting to a child. It kind of really stays with me and going back there and seeing things changed is a little spooky.

In what way?

I get a funny feeling. I kind of . . . worry about people, I guess. You know, so many of my family did die so young, and if any of them had anything to do with the mine, they died. My grandmother's brother, Roy Cleary, had a lease on it for many years, and he died young.

Do you know what he died of?

Valley Fever. They said it was silicosis, but he died within a week of when he got this. There was supposedly Valley Fever down there, which my Aunt Ethel eventually died from. Stanley Chiatovich died from it . . . several of them. But that was later when they diagnosed that. They really didn't know what it was for a long time.

So the combination of the Valley Fever, and definitely there was silicosis before they knew how to deal with the dust in the air in the mines. And you've had some relatives who had the silicosis?

Right, quite a few of them. Ernie would have been one, and Harvey Humphrey did also, and Louis died from it. I believe my grandmother's father died from it and a couple of her brothers. Some of the cousins, the Chiatoviches, did, too.

So, it's as though Flora Bess had a spiritual solution to why the deaths were happen-

ing, but then there's also some medical reasons that they found along the way.

It could have been. Yes. It could have been medical. It could have been the Indians, a lot of them died after they got there, and so they felt it was the spirits. It's hard to say. She was very different, a very calm, serene person, but very different. She would kind of predict things, and I, because I was raised Catholic, of course, I didn't believe in that. But then, some of the things would come true, and for a child it was spooky. It kind of made me wonder. It really did.

I asked her once about my grandmother and why all these horrible things had happened to her. She said, they really weren't [horrible], because you go to a better place, and she just had some interesting reasoning for it. I asked her why nothing had happened to my grandmother, and she said, "Well, she's here for a reason and someday you'll know." I still . . . I'm not sure, but I know I idolized her. And I think that helped me get a better education, trying to do things, help people. I raised a lot of foster children and did things just because that's what she did. I don't know anybody who had anything bad to say about her, which is strange in this day and age, really.

Yes. You ended up with a real mixture as a child then of Flora Bess, your grandmother, your own parents. Some contrasting and complementary things, both. Can you think about that a little bit and let's talk about it, because here you've got the medicine woman who's giving you some spiritual answers for things. You've got your grandmother who had so many losses and such difficulty with that. And how does that end up for you?

I guess as a child it was confusing, but as I got older I can see where they paralleled each other, really. Each had strong, strong

beliefs and lived those beliefs, and I think they're very similar. Even though it may sound disparate, it's not.

OK. So how did you sort that out for yourself?

Just thinking about it myself, not really talking to anyone. Actually, one time I just sat down and made notes and kind of compared each thing, like lists of what each person believed, and how they really were similar in the long run. They really were the same beliefs—just believing in something stronger, a stronger power and everything is for a reason. I never did dwell on something bad that happened.

And then, also, your grandmother's way of taking care of the miners or the families that needed something compared to you taking care of foster children—just finding similarities.

Giving back. And then both of my parents became ill, and I moved them in with me, which was really good, because they were both great people, and it feels good to be able to give something back to someone who has done so much for you. Then I think I really understood where she was coming from, because it's not so much you're doing something for somebody else. You're getting so much back that you're really not doing something for them. You're doing it for yourself.

I see. Maybe by taking care of people, she could take care of and yet keep that distance there. That was part of her healing from all of her losses.

I think it was. It's a tremendous healing process. It really works. You don't really know that's what you're doing at the time, but it does work. But she's the only person

I've ever known who never had a bad word to say about anyone or anything.

And that's pretty amazing, because gossip can go crazy in a small town.

Oh, yes, and people knew better than to tell her anything about anybody or anything bad, because she would tell them off. She'd say, "You have no right." I think that's why people liked her. They respected her. With all that had happened to her, she was always cheerful—always had something positive, which was great.

You were there every summer, but then at one point you went back and moved in with her. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

That was after I got out of college. I went down there on vacation. It would have been about 1968, right around there, and I got a good job offer from Foote Mineral Company.

What were you doing for them?

I was a secretary, and then I would work for the geologist also, going out and helping survey, doing things like that. I wasn't going to take the job, but my grandmother said, "Well, you really want to be back here," because I always came back there at any vacation. And she said, "Why don't you live with me for a while. I really need you to." That impressed me, because she didn't usually ask the family to come back and stay. So I lived with her for, I guess, two years, and then I got a place across the street and stayed there. She didn't have running water, a bathroom or anything, and that's pretty hard when you've gotten used to it.

Her house was still the way it would have been probably in the 1930s, with no running water, no indoor bathroom.

Right. She didn't believe in those. She said it built character not to have those, that those were things you just didn't need. I did. [laughter] But it was great because just about every night she and I would go out for a drive or in the hills. Every weekend we'd go to either Bishop or Tonopah, grocery shopping and for dinner. I was really, really close to her, and I just felt very special, because she got so close to me when she didn't to the rest of the family.

So your time in Silver Peak was working at Foote Mineral and then spending time with your grandmother?

And riding horses.

Riding horses all around that area, is that right?

Yes, just about every night and on weekends. I loved to go out. Even as a child I would go out. My parents never worried about me going out by myself, even at six, eight years old.

On the horses?

Right. I mean, I'd just roughly tell them where I was going, and that was fine. I'd just take off for the day.

OK. How would you describe Silver Peak in 1968 when you were there? You were there for how many years?

I worked for Foote Mineral for about eight years.

Eight years. So you were there two years with your grandmother and six years living on your own?

Right across the street.

Tell me, what was the work like? Did you enjoy it? Was it interesting work for you?

It was fantastic work. It was interesting. Foote Mineral had just started at that time with the lithium mining, and it was in mining, which I've always been interested in, and they would teach me a lot of things about geology. I had originally wanted to be a geologist, but back then Mackay School [Mackay School of Mines, University of Nevada, Reno] didn't really want women in the geology program. And at the time my Uncle Harvey was a Senator, and he was on the mines and mining committee. I'd go to Carson with him off and on. It was interesting. There was just a lot to do, and it was just beautiful country to me—riding out there on the horse and seeing things people hadn't seen in years. It seemed like nothing changed, and that was great. The old towns were still there. Weepah was still there. There were even tablecloths and dishes still on the tables. It seemed permanent. It was nice.

So you would have been born in the 1940s, is that right? And then came back to live there in the 1960s, and it was pretty much as you remembered it in that twenty years?

Right. It really hadn't changed, and most of my family was still there then—Ruby, Harvey Humphrey, Virginia, and my grandmother. Some of them had died, but some of the cousins would be in and out, coming back and forth. And some of Anna's great-grandchildren occasionally would live with her.

So in that twenty-year time period, basically, the town had stayed the same? Because the war closed down the mines, so whatever mining activity was sort of on an individual basis during that time, as far as you know?

Basically, the Sixteen-to-One Mine was open. That was from a company out of Idaho, and it was running then. The Mohawk had closed down, the big mine that my Uncle Harvey had. Ernie originally found it in 1912 when he was a kid. It had caved in, and some people were killed, so they closed it. And then Foote Mineral was running, but the other mines were just individual small mines, usually one or two people.

Right. So Foote Mineral was the big employer in town at that point, but otherwise the town was pretty much as you remembered. It hadn't changed. So you would have been there up through 1976. Did you see changes in the town during that eight years that you were there?

Some changes, yes.

What would be one of the most significant ones you noticed?

They moved in a lot of trailers, and a lot of the people who came in were very transient, as far as they really didn't have any family, no connections to Nevada. They were just there to get whatever they could and leave. And then there started to be some crime and things going on and some drug use, which changed things a lot. It used to be nothing was locked up, but we had to start locking everything up, and that was the worst part.

Can you give some examples of the crime?

Well, there were several rapes in the town, a lot of break-ins, a lot of vehicle robberies, and just a lot of people going up to the old mines, say, stripping the copper wire, burning the buildings down for no reason. We used to have a lot of old out-buildings in the hills to keep the stoves in, keep the canned food in, just in case

somebody got trapped or stuck. And they would take all the wood off the building, take the stoves, and then just burn what was left of the building down.

What kind of law enforcement was there for these kinds of incidents?

There really wasn't any. There was a sheriff in Goldfield, but he preferred not to come to Silver Peak. It got to be a little bit rough, and there really wasn't much he could do. It was hard to figure who was doing it. It was such a big area. It really was tough to find out anything that was happening. Most of the people would come and go so fast, they just couldn't catch them.

Did you start to see a change in the people that you knew and their openness to newcomers?

A little bit, yes. They were a little wary of people. It used to be you just opened your doors to anybody. If they got stuck or needed a place to stay, you let them stay. My grandmother still did, and I worried about her, because I was afraid of what could happen to her. She trusted everybody, but she never did get hurt, never had a problem. But some of the family did. They had a lot of things stolen. None of them were hurt, but vehicles were stolen and some of the old artifacts. Even some of the tombstones on the graves disappeared, and it was just sad to see that go.

Yes, you mentioned drug use also. Do you remember specific incidents of that?

Basically, it was a lot of drug trafficking. There was a back road from Los Angeles that came through Fish Lake Valley into Silver Peak, plus the air strip. And from what I had heard, it was kind of a central drop for drugs for Nevada, basically, and for Las Vegas, because they could get over the California

border on the dirt roads. There was a problem.

But you didn't know or you didn't have any firsthand sighting?

Not really. You'd see things go on. We'd see different exchanges or planes landing, and we'd ignore it. We really would, because our family just wasn't into that, and we kind of avoided trouble, which probably isn't a good approach, but it was better than getting involved in something like that.

Especially if you thought there was no law enforcement to back you up.

And there wasn't. Some of the family, we would try not to get them involved, because they might have done some enforcing on their own. That was occasionally done down there.

Who would have done that?

My Uncle Harvey.

He wasn't a bonafide deputy sheriff or anything?

Not really. He was technically the game warden and things like that. But my grandfather had been a deputy sheriff, and my Uncle Harvey just adored him. He had his badge. He had everything, and he kind of modeled himself after him in a way, I guess. He would always say, "Is this what John would have done? John wouldn't have ignored this." So he would do things.

Can you remember a specific instance that you might have heard about or seen?

There was one time, he and Don Tomany, the sheriff from Tonopah, were taking a prisoner to Goldfield, and they said the prisoner jumped out of the car and ran

away. He was handcuffed and manacled and in the back seat. He didn't have doors, but it's hard to say what happened. The man had been a child rapist, and I don't really know what happened. It just kind of stuck with me when they both said he just jumped out and ran away.

And so what happened to him? Did you ever know?

No, they never found him. He disappeared, which is possible, and I never questioned it. My uncle never mentioned it again and neither did the sheriff, and that was the Tonopah sheriff of Nye County.

And it was someone from Silver Peak?

It was a transient miner.

Who had raped a child?

Several.

And was that during the time you were there?

Yes. And, in fact, some of the townspeople were about to . . . They were afraid the father of one of the children would shoot him, and then, of course, go to prison himself or have a problem. But they were just transporting him. It's hard to say what happened. It's just one of those stories. But I do remember them taking him, leaving town with him on the back road to Goldfield, and after that I'm not sure what happened. I started to ask about it, and my dad said, "Just let it go," so I did.

It's a difficult position for people when there's no nearby support and children are being attacked.

And these weren't the local children either. It was quite a group of miners that

came in when the Sixteen-to-One Mine was going. They were building a mill up the valley, and there were a lot of people coming in and out and a lot of them weren't from Nevada at all. They were just trying to find work, so they were bringing them in at minimum wage, and they really had no place to stay. They brought in some old, horrible trailers—no water, no bathrooms—and it was really kind of sad the way they treated some of these people.

Now, was this still in the 1970s when you were there?

Nineteen sixties and early 1970s.

And who was running the Sixteen-to-One at that time?

It was a company from Idaho. I'm not sure.

Was that the Sunshine Mining Company? Because they opened that, actually, in the 1980s, 1981, I believe. But they were in there in the 1970s as you recall?

It was Sunshine. They were doing exploration work and clearing out one of the old tunnels, doing a lot of different work there.

I see. And that's when some of these problems were happening?

Right. Parsons Construction was employing a lot of men, too, doing different work. Part of it was the Mary Mine. They were going to reopen, and one of the times there were, I guess, about a hundred different people in there working in the different areas.

So that was quite a big change from when you were growing up, even from when you arrived in 1968.

It was a big change, yes. Just a lot of . . . I wouldn't say strangers, but people that hated the country. They hated it there, and they weren't there by choice, and they were just very angry people.

So a whole different attitude about being there from the residents of Silver Peak, who loved it and for whom it was home.

Right. It was their choice to be there, so they did love it. But the others were people who absolutely hated it. It is tough country unless you love it. It's hard to live with.

Can you name some of the ways that it's difficult to live there?

A lot of people think it isn't pretty. I do. And the winters can be bad. Back when I was there it was pretty bad. You'd have quite a bit of snow and extreme cold. It's almost always windy. It's dusty. You can't really keep a house clean very well. But it's pretty in its own way, and there's so much to do. To me there was always something to do. There wasn't enough time.

Because you're an outdoors person, and there's a lot to do outdoors in that area.

And my family being in mining and all my uncles always taking me along with them—it was great.

Now, you've also just been back there over this past Labor Day [1996]. Tell me about the changes again, because you moved away in 1976. I know you've been back several times, but this time it struck you again about changes. Can you tell me what?

Tremendous changes. Basically, the landscape has changed because of the mining and the different things they're doing. It's changed a lot. The roads have all

changed, new roads. And the houses that were my family's houses, of course, different people living in them. They look different.

Like Anna Shirley's house?

Especially that. She always had beautiful flower gardens around it, different things, and they're gone.

It's pretty run down now.

Extremely. It was an old house. It was moved originally from Candelaria. It was well over a hundred years old, but it was always kept up, always painted, flowers, trees—lots of trees.

And it was a very distinctive house, because it had the peaked roof, but with the long sloping . . .

Right, and the back of it actually is two feet underground, the bottom part up to the windows in the kitchen, which was fun during thunderstorms when it would flood. Up to two feet of water in the house, yes. But just seeing the yards gone, the old corrals we had for all the horses, and seeing a lot of the mustangs and things gone. Then I saw a lot of them shot and that really bothered me. There were twenty-three or twenty-four that were shot at the one family spring when we drove up there. They had been dead two or three days, and to think somebody would do that.

And that had just happened over Labor Day this year?

Yes, and just to think somebody would shoot innocent animals that have a hard enough time getting a living out there. And for no reason. It just wouldn't have happened when I lived there. It just wouldn't. Everybody pretty much was "live and let live." Even though my uncle ran

cattle, he let the mustangs run. In fact, he'd feed them in the winter if it was a bad winter. And to think somebody would just go there and shoot and kill them. It's a different attitude. No respect for life, I guess. Just not a lot of respect in a lot of ways—for the land, for the animals, for the homes—just seeing the way things are run down and dirty and a lot of trash. There just never was trash there before. There were no junk cars. Everything was picked up. It was clean. Even though it was hard to keep clean, people took a lot of pride in that.

That's interesting, because I remember one of the first things as you drive into town is a mobile home with old cars by it. So that's one of the first impressions that you get.

A lot of the junk cars. Sort of like Silver City, yes. [laughter] But at that time there were no mobile homes. There's nothing wrong with mobile homes if they're kept up. A lot of the trees are gone. The old swimming hole's totally dried up, and that was fabulous. That was a party place. Every Sunday was a potluck. Even if you didn't have any food to bring or anything, it didn't matter, because everybody brought extra, and everybody was welcome. And they'd have bands and fun, just family get-togethers.

And this was happening as recently as the 1970s when you worked there?

Every Sunday, without fail. People from Tonopah would come, and it was great. Just kind of a family affair, but everybody was welcome. And now people just don't seem as friendly as they did. A lot of them that I talked to when I was down there hated the country, hated being there, but they were forced to be there. I finally had listened to one for quite a while and asked why he didn't just leave, and he said, "Well, this is where my job is." So it really wasn't his

choice to be there, which is what I think has changed—the attitudes of people. They're so very unhappy there. There are a few that, of course, love it and will be there forever, but for some of them it just isn't their choice. For our whole family, it really was.

You mentioned also that there are very few of your family remaining there now. Can you name the ones that are?

The only one there now is my Aunt Ruby, who is my aunt by marriage. Out of the whole family, all I have left is the one cousin. That was Harvey Humphrey's daughter, and that's it.

And she's not living there now, correct? That is Sue Thompson in Irvine, California?

Yes. In fact, she sold the house. She has a mining claim there still, the old family mine. But Sue comes up once a year to do her assessment work, and she will not even stay in Silver Peak now. She was born, raised there, but she said it's just changed too much, and it hurts too much to go back. It is hard to see the family homes with other people in them, and it's just sad.

I guess it was just a family town. Everybody was related or you called them a cousin even if they weren't. And everybody worked together and were friends.

Most were cousins, because when you name all of these families that you're related to—the Gilberts, the Humphreys, the Clearys, the Shirleys, and then on into the Chiatovich families—by marriage you were actually related to almost everyone there.

It really was when you think about it. There was even a relationship to the Banoviches, who were there for a while, and distantly, the Cavanaughs. Everybody was related, actually, in one way or another,

whether it would be a third or fourth cousin, they were related.

Right. So every weekend at the reservoir must have been like a family reunion, the picnics.

It was. It was fun, and all the kids were like brothers and sisters.

One of the things that you had mentioned before was that the building that your grandma lived in was moved from Candelaria. But was it also used as a Pony Express stop at one point?

There was a Pony Express stop slightly farther up the street in Silver Peak. It was the original Pony Express station in the area.

Is that still there? Can you see where that was?

It's gone. It was there two years ago, and it's gone now. I asked my aunt about it, and she said it had just deteriorated, and then it burned. It was adobe in parts, but it did burn. They had to level it.

I also do have some great old pictures of My grandmother's brothers, for a while, drove the twenty-mule teams from Death Valley, and I have some pictures of that. They actually drove into Silver Peak to get their mule teams there. Those were interesting.

GLOSSARY

Unless otherwise noted, all definitions are from *The Glossary of Geology* (Falls Church, Virginia: American Geological Institute, 1980) or from *Nevada Ghost Towns and Mining Camps*, by Stanley Paher (San Diego, California: Howell-North Books, 1970).

adit, n. A horizontal passage from the surface into a mine, sometimes called a tunnel.

alluvial, adj. Deposited by a stream or running water.

amalgam, n. A naturally occurring alloy of silver with mercury; a general term for alloys of mercury with one or more of the well-known metals, especially an alloy of mercury with gold, containing 40 to 60 percent gold and obtained from the plates in a mill treating gold ore.

assay, v. To analyze the proportions of metals in an ore; to test an ore or mineral for composition, purity, weight, or other properties of commercial interest.

backwall, n. Headwall or a steep slope at the head of a valley.

ball mill, n. A rotating horizontal cylinder with a diameter almost equal to the length supported by a frame or shaft in which materials are ground using grinding media such as iron or steel balls.

blasting, n., v. An explosion of dynamite; to blow up or move with an explosive.

bonanza, n. A miner's term for a rich body of ore or a rich part of a deposit; a mine is "in bonanza" when it is operating profitably.

claim, n. In mining law, a portion of public land on which an individual may have mining rights.

claim jumping, n. Taking over mining property after it has been staked by someone else, usually before the claim is recorded.

collar, n. The mouth or upper end of a mine shaft.

concentrates, n. The valuable fraction of an ore that is left after worthless material is removed in processing.

cyanide process, *n.* A process for the extraction of gold from finely crushed ores, concentrates, and tailings by means of cyanide potassium. The gold is dissolved by the solution and subsequently deposited upon metallic zinc or by other means.

district, *n.* In the states and territories west of the Missouri (prior to 1880), a vaguely bounded and temporary division and organization made by the inhabitants of a mining region.

drift, *n.* A horizontal or nearly horizontal underground opening driven along a vein.

dump, *n.* A pile or heap of waste-rock material or other non-ore refuse near a mine.

fault, *n.* A fracture or a zone of fractures along which there has been displacement of the sides relative to one another parallel to the fracture.

float, *n.* A general term for isolated, displaced fragments of a rock, especially on a hillside below an outcropping ledge or vein.

flotation, *n.* The method of mineral separation in which a froth created in water by a variety of reagents floats some finely crushed minerals, whereas other minerals sink.

footwall, *n.* The underlying side of a fault, orebody, or mine working; especially the wall rock beneath an inclined vein or fault.

gangue, *n.* The valueless rock or mineral aggregates in an ore; that part of an ore that is not economically desirable but cannot be avoided in mining. It is separated from the ore minerals during concentration.

hanging wall, *n.* The overlying side of an orebody, fault, or mine working; especially the wall rock above an inclined vein or fault.

hard rock, *n.* A term used loosely for igneous or metamorphic rock, as distinguished from sedimentary rock. A rock that requires drilling and blasting for its economical removal.

headframe, *n.* The steel or timber frame at the top of a shaft which carries the sheave or pulley for the hoisting rope and serves various other purposes.

high-grade, *adj.* Said of an ore with a relatively high ore-mineral content

high-grading, *n.* Stealing of valuable ore or mineral specimens by employees in a mine.

jewelry rock, *n.* Rich ore.

lagging, *n.* Heavy planks or timbers used to support the roof of a mine or for the floors of working places and for the accumulation of rock and earth in a stope.

leaching, *n.* The extraction of soluble metals or salts from an ore by means of slowly percolating solutions; e.g. the separation of gold by treatment with a cyanide solution.

ledge, *n.* A narrow shelf or projection of rock, much longer than wide, formed on a rock wall or cliff face.... A rocky outcrop; solid rock. A quarry exposure or natural outcrop of a mineral deposit.

lens, *n.* A geologic deposit bounded by converging surfaces (at least one of which is curved), thick in the middle and thinning out toward the edges, resembling a convex lens.

level, *n.* Mines are customarily worked from shafts through horizontal passages or drifts called levels. These are commonly spaced at regular intervals in depth and are either numbered from the surface in regular order

or designated by their actual elevation below the top of the shaft.

lifters, n. A set of holes drilled for dynamite blasting in a mine which, when exploded, lifts the rock.

lode, n. A well-defined occurrence of valuable mineral-bearing material.

mill, n. Reducing plant where ore is concentrated and/or metals recovered.

mucking, n. Loading broken rock by hand or machine and removing it following a blast.

ore, n. The naturally occurring material from which a mineral or minerals of economic value can be extracted at a reasonable profit.

orebody, n. A continuous, well-defined mass of material of sufficient ore content to make extraction economically feasible.

outcrop, n. The part of a rock formation that appears at the surface of the ground.

overburden, n. Barren rock material, either loose or consolidated, overlying a mineral deposit.

patent, n. A document which conveys title to the ground, and no further assessment work needs to be done.

pillar, n. A term used in the southwest United States for a large pillarlike or projecting rock.

pulp, n. A mixture of ground ore and water capable of flowing through suitably graded channels as a fluid.

raise, n. A mine shaft driven upward from a lower to a higher level.

run, n. A flat, irregular, ribbon-like orebody following the stratification of the host rock.

shaft, n. A vertical or inclined excavation through which a mine is worked.

skip, n. A large hoisting bucket which slides between guides in a shaft, the bail usually connecting at or near the bottom of the bucket so that it may be automatically dumped at the surface. An open iron vehicle or car on four wheels running on rails and used especially on inclines or in inclined shafts.

skip tender, n. The person who operated the skip.

slurry, n. A highly fluid mixture of water and finely divided material.

square set, n. A set of timbers composed of cap, girt, and post. These members meet to form a solid 90-degree angle. They are so framed at the intersection as to form a compression joint and join with three other similar sets. This system of timbering can be adapted to large or irregular ore bodies.

stamp mill, n. An apparatus in which rock is crushed by descending pestles or stamps operated by water, steam, or electric power. Also, the building containing the machinery.

stope, n. An underground excavation formed by the extraction of ore.

stringer, n. A mineral veinlet or filament, usually one of a number, occurring in a discontinuous subparallel pattern in host rock.

tailings, n. Those portions of washed or milled ore that are regarded as too poor to be treated further, as distinguished from the concentrates or material of value.

tram, *v.* To haul or push cars about in a mine.

tunnel, *n.* Strictly speaking, a passage in a mine that is open to the surface at both ends. It is often used loosely as a synonym for adit or drift.

vein, *n.* A zone or belt of mineralized rock lying within boundaries clearly separating it from neighboring rock.

winze, *n.* A subsidiary shaft which starts underground. It is usually a connection between two levels.

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